

The Role of Food in American Society



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Introduction

by the authors

Imagine yourself in a typical supermarket. The store is filled from wall to wall, top to bottom, with thousands of food choices, a wide and bountiful “variety.” Yet as Michael Pollan demonstrates in his book, *The Omnivore’s Dilemma*, there is less variety than meets the eye; the majority of this selection actually derives from a small group of ingredients, including processed forms of corn. The way those ingredients have come to us as dinner speaks volumes about contemporary American economy, politics and culture. As the food industry continues to create new uses for corn, the American diet has become entangled in a war between a historically specific and culturally constructed notion of “nutrition,” and emerging, equally constructed concepts of “natural” and “organic” foods. As Pollan’s work makes clear, the battle for control over the American dinner plate opens up new ways to understand the most fundamental of human choices: what to eat.¹

The dilemma has important historical dimensions, of course. To one degree or another, the question of what and how to eat has confronted every person across time, and has shaped the activities of individuals, communities, and policy makers. We are united as human beings in our need to sustain ourselves with a diet of fats, carbohydrates and proteins. Our societies have long been organized in large measure to fulfill this collective need. Moreover, throughout history, the sharing of food has served as the lubricant to produce an atmosphere of camaraderie and congeniality. As anthropologists and historians have emphasized, religious rituals, holidays and festivals emphasize food’s power to bind individuals into communities and symbolize their unity and goodwill toward one another.²

But food has also played a different role in American culture, acting at times as a divisive force. Although eating is simply necessary to human survival, foodways have become inseparable from cultural meaning and have been deployed as powerful agents of social change and reform. What we eat, where it comes from, and how it is prepared has never been culturally or politically neutral. At different points in American history, food has served to demarcate “civilized” from “savage” behavior and to divide the consumption habits of the wealthy from

¹ Michael Pollan, *The Omnivore’s Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals* (New York: Penguin, 2006).

² Essential essays on these themes are included in Carole Counihan and Penny Van Esterik, eds., *Food and Culture: A Reader* (New York and London: Routledge, 1997).

those of the “hungry, huddled masses.” Food has figured in countless cultural clashes, legal battles, and reform movements. Different ways of producing and consuming meals have come to symbolize religious, ethnic and gender identities, and particular moral and political commitments. Across the wide expanse of American history, food has even played a role in the subjugation of specific groups of people. It has served to define the notion of “progress” across cultural space and to carve out gendered social roles for men and women. Thus, food is much more than sustenance. It is an active cultural force that defines groups of people in their choices to consume, reject, or reform both food and the ways in which it is produced.

Food’s dual role as a universal need *and* as a defining force in human culture helps explain why food history is such a compelling subject. Food history (not to be confused with culinary history, the study of specific recipes and preparations) is the examination of the economic, environmental, cultural and sociological impact of what we decide to put on our plates.³ As evidenced by the following collection of essays, these decisions have shaped American society, culture and the environment in significant ways. Inspired by readings in food history, this collection of essays was produced in Spring 2010 by a group of students from the University of Kansas. Our collective work has come to focus on food’s role as an agent of social change and cultural reform in American society. While this work was not conceived with this specific direction in mind, our research highlighted the ways that food has affected traditionally disempowered groups of people—namely children, indigenous peoples, prison inmates, and women. We argue that ideas about food production and consumption have been essential in the definition of power relationships in American society. Focusing on pivotal topics such as gender, culture, counterculture, and politics, this collective work demonstrates that foodways provide a meaningful way to examine broader social changes in United States history.

The essays that follow look at food from a variety of angles: we explore histories of Native Americans and the “civilizing” projects of the early nineteenth century, radical vegetarian Kansan communes and Kansas women’s penal reform in the same century, twentieth century home economics curriculum and twenty-first century school lunches. We have chosen to arrange this collection chronologically and collectively span a period of over two hundred years.

Inspired by the Second Great Awakening in the early nineteenth century, Euro-Americans organized efforts to “civilize” Native peoples based on conceptions of their own racial and cultural superiority. This process included the assimilation of all Native peoples, cultures, and lifestyles into the nineteenth-century Euro-American tradition of family, agriculture, and Christianity. Richard Henry Pratt, superintendent of the Carlisle Indian School, summarized the goals of acculturation in his now-famous phrase, “kill the Indian, save the man.” As

³ For a discussion of the distinctions between food history and culinary history, see Ken Albala. “History on the Plate: The Current State of Food History.” *Historically Speaking* 10, no. 5 (2009): 6-8. <http://muse.jhu.edu/> (accessed April 15, 2010).

author **Hannah Ballard** reveals, a key aspect of Native acculturation focused on the transformation of gender roles within the realm of food production. Ballard suggests that the production of food provided a unique avenue for both active and passive resistance to the influence of the European-style missionaries and government agents.

In another form of resistance, a group of reformers settled in southeastern Kansas with ambitions of resisting mainstream American culture. Author **Kelly Heiman** illustrates the importance of food production and consumption in the short-lived successes and ultimate failure of this communal frontier community. The Vegetarian Kansas Immigration Society, as the society was known, is quite important because, at its heart, it reflects the larger social reform movements of the time period; the founders of the community established the community upon radical principles of abolition, anti-industrialism, and communism. Chief among them, however, was the adherence to a strict dietary rule of vegetarianism. As Heiman suggests, what a nineteenth-century reformer chose to put in his body was just as significant a social statement as the various other radical actions of the time period. In this case, food choices were explicitly political and oppositional.

Author **Wes Kimmel** continues the study on the cultural significance of the production and consumption of food by examining the role of food in the rehabilitative curriculum of the Kansas Industrial School for Girls, an all-female prison institution founded in 1889. Adopting the penal philosophy of the time period, administrators of the Industrial School considered the crimes of the female prisoners the result of wayward morality. Administrators therefore sought to establish an environment and curriculum focused solely on the moral reformation of character. As Kimmel argues, domestic food production, preparation, and consumption was central to the reform program. The institution's attempts to transform "moral deviants" into functioning housewives in rural Kansas reflects the gendered nature of the broader social roles concerning morality and food production and consumption in early twentieth century America.

Moving the discussion of food's role in society into the mid-twentieth century, author **Julia Barnard** discusses how the academic discipline of home economics approached food preparation and food buying within the historical and social context of the 1950s. Barnard frames her work around the story of Janice, a young girl featured in a 1950s hygiene film about home economics, and offers a compelling account of how economic concerns, social norms, and marketing interests made their way into the home economics classroom. Barnard highlights the important role that food played in the post WWII era in shaping a consumer society in which choices about food were shaped by cultural norms about gender and class.

Author **Tyler Holmes** concludes the examination of the role food plays in shaping society by focusing his discussion on nutrition education in the context of the late-twentieth-century classroom. Federally-shaped school lunch menus and the corresponding nutrition education programs reflect a contested cultural definition of "healthy" food. Holmes suggests that the menus and programs give

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students mixed messages about health that reflect our culture's mixed economic and public health priorities in regards to food. He also highlights the impacts of agricultural industry lobbyists and of the larger fast food industry in shaping public understanding of what constitutes healthy and delicious food. Through his research into the complex and ever-changing modern conception of "healthy" food, Holmes shows that despite efforts in the public and private sectors, recent statistics suggest that young Americans today may be the first generation with a lower life expectancy than their parents. Holmes suggests that we desperately need a powerful alternative to the current ways that nutrition is framed in the media.

The production of this body of essays, centered on the significance of food as an agent of social change, gave the authors an opportunity to delve deeply into a wide range of primary source documents including film, legislation, missionary records, diaries, and personal letters. Though the means by which a group of people nourishes itself tends to be discounted as an insignificant cultural indicator, this collection argues that specific foodways can and do serve as active agents of change. Food, the sustainer and source of collective and personal identity, ceaselessly reflects the values of American communities.

Contributors

Hannah Ballard currently attends the University of Kansas and is majoring in History, with a specific interest in American cultural history of the nineteenth century. She will graduate in May 2011, and her future plans include attending graduate school with the ultimate goal of earning a Ph.D in the field of American history. Hannah hopes to utilize her degree in an academic environment, preferably at a university level. During the summer of 2010, Hannah will participate in the Gilder Lehrman One Week History Scholars Program in New York, which will provide her with the opportunity to meet distinguished historians that work on periods such as Antebellum America, the Civil War, and Reconstruction.

Julia Barnard is a sophomore History major from Lawrence. She is interested in community activism and service, and currently coordinates trips for KU Alternative Breaks. Academically, she is focused on issues surrounding urban history and education history, and hopes to one day make a career out of working on these questions.

Kelly Heiman is a junior at the University of Kansas, studying History and Environmental Studies. A vegetarian since her teenage years and a Kansas native, Kelly became fascinated with vegetarian philosophy and the local vegetarian social experiment that occurred in Neosho County, Kansas in the mid-nineteenth century. Her paper is a glance into the theory and lives of these liberal social reformers who braved everything to move to the wilderness and live by their principles. In her spare time, Kelly enjoys bike riding, sewing, cooking sans-meat and rocking out with local band Tangent Arc.

Tyler Holmes is a junior pursuing a double major in political science and history. Holmes works as a resident assistant Oliver Hall and as a student coordinator of study groups at the Dole Institute of Politics. His passion for politics (including a candidacy for the Kansas State House in 2008) and ongoing experience with cafeteria food directed his study towards the involvement of government policy on the composition and education of school-age children for this journal.

Wesley James Kimmel is a junior in history at the University of Kansas. A native of Hutchinson, Kansas, he is the son of Tedd and Julie Kimmel. He looks forward to studying the German language and culture while abroad this summer in Holzkirchen, Germany.

“The old incorrigible rogues will have their way”: Prairie Band Potawatomi Foodways in the Age of Removal

Hannah Ballard

In September of 1852, Indian agent Francis W. Lea revealed deep disappointment in a report detailing the present condition of the Potawatomi tribe on the Kansas reservation. As Agent Lea began his account, he bemoaned the lack of progress made by the tribe since his previous report. Lea complained that, “with the ample funds set apart by the government to aid them, they should now be much further in the culture of the soil and other kindred pursuits of a civilized community; but they perform all kinds of manual labor with a great reluctance, and very few of them have been induced to abandon their deep-rooted improvident habits.”¹ Later that same year, J.B. Duernick composed his federal report claiming the success of St. Mary’s mission in acculturating the Potawatomi tribe. Still, Duernick regretfully informed the U.S. Secretary of the Interior that much was left to accomplish. “The Pottawatomie Prairie Indians have not yet laid aside their wild and uncivilized mode of living,” he admitted. “[T]hey are averse to work, and live in wretched cabins and wigwams. They paint their faces and delight in all sorts of motley and fantastical dress and trappings.”² The Potawatomi’s “wild and uncivilized mode of living” and “deep-rooted improvident habits” that caused the missionaries and agents such profound grief and frustration included, most notably, the Native practice of communal horticulture and a belief in the spiritually-sanctioned power of Native women as producers in Potawatomi foodways.

Lea’s and Duernick’s conclusions concerning the lifestyle of the Potawatomi proved a common theme in government reports of the mid-nineteenth century. Throughout the 1850s, in fact, the perceptions of Native culture proposed by government agents and missionaries often included numerous disparaging remarks regarding tribal interpretations of equality, reciprocity, and gender. These interpretations, which frequently stood in direct contrast to Euro-American conceptions, resulted in a century of American history marked by attempts to reform, missionize, and acculturate Native peoples. The nineteenth century fashioned a government and a people who pursued an imperialistic land policy, claiming that their national identity—viewed through the lens of Christianity and

¹ Francis W. Lea, “Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs,” Office of Indian Affairs (1850), 86.

² J.B. Duernick, “Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs,” Office of Indian Affairs (1850), 90.

the ideology of Manifest Destiny—justified the attempted destruction of Native peoples and cultures. The “Americanization” movement of the mid-nineteenth century, in particular, exhausted countless resources in efforts to “civilize the savage.” As demonstrated by agent Lea, the success of these reform efforts varied from tribe to tribe. Certain nations, such as the Prairie Band Potawatomi, resisted Euro-American notion of “progress” and “civilization.” By maintaining traditional gender roles in food production, they resisted acculturation and attempts to destroy Native identity.

During the mid-nineteenth century, federal Indian policy focused on acculturation and allotment as a means of eliminating Native communities. This legislation sought to end the practice of communally held lands within tribal societies, while at the same time forcing Euro-American conceptions of agriculture onto Native peoples.³ Though policy attempted to individualize property, Native peoples sought to maintain traditional communal land ownership as a customary cultural construction. Arguably, the strength of these beliefs facilitated the strongest Native resistance to United States colonization. The Prairie Band of the Potawatomi tribe, who hailed from the Great Lakes region, exemplified this kind of resistance to federal policy, even after their removal to northeastern Kansas. As evidenced by the Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indians Affairs and the mission records of the 1850s, the Prairie Potawatomi opposed “Americanization” throughout the 1850s, defining themselves as the most defiant and uncooperative tribe in terms of participation in, and acceptance of, federal programs and legislation.

Prairie Band resistance took many forms, most notably in their rejection of Euro-American farming methods and associated gender roles thrust upon them by the federally-funded Catholic missions. The Prairie Potawatomi, at a time when other tribes struggled to endure the influence of missionization, effectively rejected the Euro-American emphasis on agriculture, opting instead for food production methods geared towards hunting, gathering, and horticulturally-oriented communal farming. The Prairie Band also refused to accept the gender orientation of Euro-American food production roles, and instead, continued to associate the creation of foodstuff with the female sphere. This resistance resulted in accusations of indolence by the missionaries, and further threats of removal by federal agents. Over the course of the 1850s, the Prairie Potawatomi were not only able to resist the influence of Euro-American agricultural customs and techniques, but also numerous attempts to alter gender roles related to food acquisition and production. This resistance enabled the tribe to maintain both Native sovereignty and identity in a new homeland.

³ Prairie Band of Potawatomi Nation. “Tribal History.” *Our History and Culture*. 2009. <http://www.pbpindiantribe.com/tribal-history.aspx>.

Pre-Removal History and Culture

The French first encountered the Potawatomi in the early seventeenth century; they documented the tribe as residing in the lower peninsula of present-day Michigan. The term “Potawatomi,” which translates roughly as “Keepers of the Fire,” has caused much confusion since there are over one hundred documented spellings of the tribal name found in historical records.⁴ Within this Great Lakes location, the Potawatomi, like many other Native tribes, created a culture based on the necessity of full community participation in order to ensure success. Men and women each carried out particular duties and responsibilities in food production and acquisition without hierarchical differentiation. In his history of the pre-removal Potawatomi, R. David Edmunds argues that hunting was customarily a male-dominated event, but in certain instances, women would participate in order to ensure greater success.⁵ By participating in these hunting parties, women demonstrated that their presence in food acquisition was of equal importance in comparison to the male role. Thus, female participation illustrated a pre-removal belief in the equality of the sexes as a defining force in Potawatomi food creation.

James Clifton, in another history of the Potawatomi people, speaks to varied nature of the tribe’s foodways. He claimed that in their Michigan homeland, “The Potawatomi living therein practiced a dual economy, involving digging stick and hoe farming, hunting, fishing, and the gathering of wild plant foods. In summer they grew maize, pumpkins, squash, beans and tobacco, and hunted deer, elk, and beaver nearby...”⁶ Clifton’s statement reveals the importance of horticultural methods and a varied food economy in the pre-removal era. Taken together, Edmund’s and Clifton’s analyses of the Potawatomi demonstrate that the tribe operated within a gendered system of food production based on hunting, farming, and gathering. The benefits of this diverse economy were threefold: it allowed them the means to produce food in all seasons, utilize all the resources available to them in a sustainable fashion, and express cultural beliefs about distinct male and female relationships to the earth and food production.

Though Native women occasionally participated in hunting, their primary responsibility was the cultivation of crops and the maintenance of gardens in the pre-removal period. Horticulture, in contrast to the Euro-American practice of agriculture, places an emphasis on working small plots of land, such as gardens without using animals, plows, or irrigation. This method proved not only environmentally sustainable, but also consistent with Native beliefs concerning the land and relationships to the earth. In his book *Teaching Spirits* Joseph Epes Brown explains Indigenous beliefs concerning the natural world. In accordance with the utilization of horticulture rather than agriculture, Brown argues, “Agri-

⁴ James A. Clifton, *The Prairie People: Continuity and Change in Potawatomi Indian Culture 1665-1965* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1998), 13.

⁵ R. David Edmunds, *Potawatomi: Keepers of the Fire*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1978), 4.

⁶ Clifton, 32.

culture was the flagship of Manifest Destiny, for European-Americans identified it with civilization. Many of the historically nomadic tribes, however, found commercial, large-scale farming contradictory to their value systems. Some viewed the earth as sacred and inviolate and not to be torn up with a plow.⁷ In Native tradition, the earth serves an essential and primary force in the cycle of life that inexplicably connects to the “Great Spirit,” and values of reciprocity determine relationships with the land. Accordingly, the practice of horticulture, which leaves less of a human imprint on the earth, reflects Potawatomi beliefs, values, and non-capitalistic economy. Considered to be a channel through which all living things must pass, women were the logical participants in this very spiritual and intimate exchange with the earth. The Great Spirit endowed women with the power to reproduce, thus making them the spiritual vehicle meant to create and cultivate crops, livestock, and children.⁸

Pre-removal Potawatomi food productions practices were gendered, though men and women’s roles were equally important and influential. The Potawatomi of the Great Lakes region depended on a varied schedule of food acquisition that placed an equal burden on both sexes, while attempting to avoid unnecessary environmental degradation. Tribal leaders distributed the food throughout the community, reflecting a belief in the sharing of resources based on a relationship of reciprocity within Potawatomi culture. Thus, Potawatomi foodways were defined by a distinct gendered division of labor and by the principle of reciprocity. These defining characteristics later became key targets for Euro-American acculturation efforts. However, despite the goals of the missionaries, the Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs and mission records of the 1850s illustrate that Native peoples continued to distribute responsibility for the tribal subsistence according to traditional norms, and to emphasize mixed methods of food acquisition based on a gendered division of labor. This cultural construction not only influenced other gender-power relationships within the community, but also remained influential enough that it could cross geographic borders, reestablish itself in a new homeland, and effectively counter Euro-American pressure to “civilize.”

The Post-Removal Experience

By the late 1840s, the Prairie Band settled in the northeastern corner of Kansas. At the end of that same decade, St. Mary’s mission opened with the sole purpose of “civilizing” the recent arrivals. In the view of St. Mary’s and the federal government, the goal of the civilization program would culminate in the phrase, “kill the Indian, save the man.” In other words, Euro-Americans aimed to fashion productive, albeit inferior, “Americanized” citizens from the Native American populations. Missions became the vehicle for this task; St. Mary’s

⁷ Joseph Epes Brown, *Teaching Spirits* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 100.

⁸ Brown, 80.

serves as an illustrative example of how the missionaries achieved this. The St. Mary’s mission was divided into men’s and women’s schools, with each sex being trained for lives structured by Euro-American gender norms. St. Mary’s trained the males in manual labor and agriculture and assigned females to the domestic sphere, practicing activities such as sewing, housekeeping, and embroidery.⁹

The Prairie Band of the Potawatomi tribe, known for being particularly uncooperative, frequently frustrated both the Indian agents and Catholic missionary leaders. John W. Whitfield, agent to the Potawatomi in 1852, claimed that the tribe remained uncivilized and were making no attempt to better their situation: “We frequently tell them to lay aside their gun and blanket...to make the young men work more, and not to saddle so much work upon their squaws. We repeat these things opportunely and importunately; the old incorrigible rogues will have their way—in spite of the world they will live on pumpkins and corn-soup, smoke their pipe, and lie all day before the fire.”¹⁰ Whitfield’s complaint illustrated the use of passive resistance by the tribe, while at the same time emphasizing the persistence of traditional gender roles. Though the Prairie Potawatomi also participated in active resistance, passive opposition proved to be an equally effective means of countering Western influence. The missionaries believed that men should perform agricultural labor, and women’s work should be restricted to the domestic. When Native women performed the work with which they were spiritually sanctioned within Native culture, missionaries then regarded Potawatomi men as indifferent and lazy. These attempts to “Americanize” Native horticulture and gender roles, as demonstrated by Agent Whitfield’s report, resulted in an indirect form of resistance that utilized stubbornness and lethargy as a means of rejecting the missionaries farming techniques. By lying idly and ignoring the requests of the church leaders, the Prairie Potawatomi managed to resist missionization and a subsequent loss of identity. Additionally, by behaving in this manner, the Potawatomi men preserved their culturally sanctioned role in food production. The male food responsibility was centered on hunting, which was performed outside of the mission and away from government leaders. Therefore, by refusing to participate in farming, men both reinstated their own gender identity and protected the female’s role within the food production process. Regardless of the objectives or accusations of St. Mary’s mission or the government, the Prairie Potawatomi demonstrated a profound opposition to Euro-American influence, and in doing so, defined themselves in their new homeland as decidedly “Native.”

Father Maurice Gaillard, head of the mission, viewed food production and distribution as key markers of civilization; if the Native population abandoned traditional food methods and replaced them with Western techniques, the entire Native culture would soon follow suit. The mission system operated under this

⁹ J.B. Duernick, “Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs,” Office of Indian Affairs (1853), 90.

¹⁰ John W. Whitfield, “Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs,” Office of Indian Affairs (1852), 86.

perception and relentlessly pursued agricultural change as the ultimate determinant of progress. Father Gaillard's diary reveals the obstacles that the mission schools faced in attempting to alter communal farming and equal distribution of food resources. He claimed, "By their ancient traditions, whatever an individual possesses should be shared with the whole village... As for the rest, we told them they ought to work to make a living... the most sensible took this advice to heart, but to many... the food was too spiritual for them to relish."¹¹ Gaillard's statement demonstrates that the cultural construction of sharing food and wealth held a spiritual significance within Potawatomi culture. Food, as a product of the Great Spirit, held too much significance to be selfishly hoarded for one's own personal enjoyment. To distribute the foodstuff equally throughout the community illustrated a belief in the collectivity of the tribe and a reciprocal responsibility of each member to the whole. This ideology stands in direct contrast to the American notion of the self-sufficient yeoman farmer, and in turn, the goals of the mission. The Western perception of agriculture centers on the notion that production equals profit; one should provide for their immediate family and then push their product through the capitalist market in order to gain a profit. Men are the key players in this exchange, thus relegating women to a passive role in food production. Native tradition, on the other hand, utilizes the labor of both sexes plus the entirety of the crop. This practice mirrors the beliefs, discussed by Brown, that earthly resources are limited and should be regarded as sacred. Leaders such as Father Gaillard interpreted these charitable actions as ignorance, claiming that the Natives had no sense of economy or savings.¹² On the contrary, the Prairie Band refused to abandon their communal foodways because they represented a deeply embedded cultural tradition that had been a staple of their economy for centuries before European contact.

Sharing resources throughout the community served as a food custom of many Native tribes, which also included women as spiritually ordained "producers" of life. This notion of gender equity, expressed through the female's responsibility to produce crops, clashed violently with Western conceptions of gender roles. Strongly influenced by the Second Great Awakening, Euro-Americans believed that women, as domestic beings, should not labor in the fields to produce food for their families; doing so would damage their femininity and sense of womanly virtue.¹³ Therefore, to "civilize the savage" meant to strip native women of their spiritual relationship to food, and coerce men to abandon hunting and their spiritual relationship to animals in order to adopt a yeoman farmer lifestyle concurrent with Euro-American values. The mission schools, divided by gender, attempted to accomplish this task. The reports of Indian agents and missionaries

¹¹ "The Annals of St. Mary's Mission—1850," *The Dial*. Vol. 3, No. 1 (St. Mary's College, 1891), 2.

¹² "The Annals of St. Mary's Mission—1855," *The Dial*. Vol. 3, No. 8 (St. Mary's College, 1892), 122.

¹³ Paul Johnson, *A Shopkeeper's Millennium: Society and Revivals in Rochester, New York 1815-1837* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978), 7.

throughout the 1850s suggest that the missions met the challenge with limited success. While annual records vaguely cited “improvement” in Westernizing the agriculture techniques of the St. Joseph and Wabash bands of the Kansas Potawatomi, instances of opposition and rejection by a particularly influential band of the tribe appeared with equal prominence.¹⁴ The Prairie Potawatomi, as one the most incessantly resistant bands of Native peoples, continued to frustrate both agents and missionaries alike on the Kansas reservation.

Over the course of the 1850s, government agents and missionaries grew more frustrated as the Prairie Potawatomi continued to thwart their plans for change. Potawatomi girls and boys would attend the mission schools, but in many cases left their education and “civilization” at the door. The Native elders, for example, often removed the boys from school when they reached an age that would permit them to hunt with the tribe. Missionary leaders and agents, who often claimed they had made significant “progress” with the children, grudgingly witnessed the young boys as they returned from these traditional hunting excursions. Whitfield, in 1853, wrote, “you see them return with shaved heads, painted faces, and dressed in full Indian costume, and really trying to excel in being of less account than any Indians in the nation.”¹⁵ Later, in 1855, the agent George W. Clark claimed, “The ‘Prairie band’ adheres to the hunter life, nearly all of whom despise the arts and principles of civilization; who regard it as disgraceful for men to work, and they spare no language in denouncing those of the tribe who cultivate the soil or follow the peaceful arts.”¹⁶ These exercises in traditional Potawatomi culture served to strengthen the active resistance of the entire tribe.

Hunting, as a staple of the male food production role, maintained its significance in the lives of the Prairie Band, both before and after removal. Men utilized hunting as a means of food production, but perhaps more importantly, they continued to practice time-honored rituals and customs surrounding the event, such as the donning of traditional clothing. Clark’s and Whitfield’s remarks on the foodways of the Prairie Potawatomi illustrate that food acquisition methods served as a decisive means of expressing a cultural identity that contrasted the Euro-American identity proposed by the missionaries. As a result of this resistance, male food production roles in the post-removal period managed to maintain a noticeably “Native” identity.

In much the same way that government agents attempted to destroy the practice of hunting among Native men, they also sought to end Native female responsibility for cultivating crops. In 1853, Whitfield bemoaned the missionaries’ failure to transform Native attitudes:

*This great people consider it a disgrace for the men to work.
Some years ago the government had some three hundred acres*

¹⁴ George W. Clark, “Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs,” Office of Indian Affairs (1853), 97.

¹⁵ Whitfield, 84.

¹⁶ Clark, 97.

of land prepared ready for planting; early in the spring a few commenced ploughing; the chiefs sent their braves into the field, cut up their harness, broke ploughs, and whipped them out, saying they had disgraced themselves, the women alone should work. These poor unfortunate beings do all the work, and, from their education, believe it right. You would be surprised to see the amount of corn they raise with the hoe alone.¹⁷

This statement, more so than any other contained within a decade of reports, demonstrates both the significance of the female role in food creation, and the dramatic cultural clashes that ensued between missionaries and the Prairie Band. Resistance, in this example, became active as Potawatomi men enforced traditional roles under siege in the mission. Men destroyed farming tools and utilized physical violence in order to prevent the destruction of traditional cultural norms surrounding food production. Active resistance, in contrast to the passive forms also employed by the tribe, illustrate that the Prairie Potawatomi were not indifferent to the changes that the missionaries and agents proposed. Instead, this band of Potawatomi violently opposed them as a threat to the identity that they had successfully transplanted from their Michigan homeland. As sanctioned by the tribe's spiritual beliefs, men participated in their gender role by emphasizing a hunter's lifestyle for themselves, and by defending women's relationship to food production through the use of violence and destruction.

Whitfield's remark brings another interesting issue to light: women's efficiency at a task that the missionaries believed they should not perform. His statement again depicted women as the primary food producers. While claiming that they were too ignorant to understand that they should not labor for food production, he was struck by their efficiency and competency at that very task. His remark, "you would be surprised to see the amount of corn they raise with the hoe alone"¹⁸ contradicts the key values of the Second Great Awakening, which claimed that women were not "designed" for a life of manual labor, but were instead "creatures of the heart" who should focus on less physically-intensive domestic activities, such as sewing, cleaning, and child-rearing.¹⁹ Native women, in the context of the 1850s reservation experience, proved very capable cultivators of land, but Euro-Americans often denied them the opportunity on the reservation based solely on these Western conceptions of gender. Whitfield's statement reveals that many Prairie Potawatomi males and females continued to practice their traditional relationship to food and its means of production, and maintained their efficiency at these tasks in their new homeland. If missionaries or government agents threatened those constructions, the Native population could utilize violence as a means of active resistance. Resistance to accultura-

¹⁷ Whitfield, 84.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Karen Haltunnen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), 57-8.

tion, particularly in reference to foodways and gender roles, defined the Prairie Band experience on the Kansas reservation. This opposition and refutation of Euro-American culture, while obviously not well received by the missionaries, also carried with it significant threats of dislocation for the tribe and the members who openly rebelled.

While rejection of Euro-American culture and tradition defined much of the Native experience in the mid-nineteenth century, the fear of displacement served as a check on that expression of resistance. The members of St. Mary’s mission were wholly dedicated to their task of “civilizing the savage” and understood the power and influence that governmental approval afforded them. The use of threats to “bring the population into line” was not uncommon. For example, in a diary entry dated in the year 1850, Gaillard claims, “. . . we warn them that, unless they abandon their former habits of life and settle down to work for a living. . . they will be removed from the land and driven away further and further, they will die of hardship and become extinct among the nations.”²⁰ In some cases, the mission used the threats solely as a scare tactic in an attempt to convince the population to cooperate. The threat of removal, however, loomed a very realistic possibility. In either case, the utilization of threats demonstrates a need to “break” the Native person through fear and anxiety.

As a staple of Euro-American “progress,” the mission targeted food production methods with the most rigorous rounds of threats and assault. Nevertheless, according to the personal letters of Father Gaillard in 1854, the greater the civilization efforts on the part of the mission, the greater the counter resistance by the Prairie Band. In his frustration with their refusal to adopt Euro-American methods, Gaillard declares, “. . . with nearly every one of them his pride is equal to his ignorance. . . they are like stubborn mules who balk and will not cross the stream. . .”²¹ While many of the documents contain dramatic statements about the success of the mission, the authors clearly devote equal space to the dogged persistence of tribes, such as the Prairie Potawatomi, who continued to thwart and reject many measures of “improvement.” Clark validates Gaillard’s frustration when he states in 1855:

“The ‘Prairie’ band is a bold and reckless race, and although they form a minority of the tribe, they domineer over it, rule and misgovern the people in a most lawless manner. Thus two conflicting elements prevail to distract and stifle the usual efforts of government to improve these people; and I am of the unchangeable opinion that government should not only *assume* the patriarchal, but *exercise* a dictatorial rule over this tribe.”²²

²⁰ “The Annals of St. Mary’s Mission—1851,” *The Dial*. Vol. 5, No. 3 (St. Mary’s College, 1892), 74.

²¹ Father Maurice Gaillard, “Letter to Father Hubert,” in *Mid-America, A Historical Review*. Vol. 36, No. 4 (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1954), 246.

²² Clark, 97.

Even under the threat of removal and tyrannical rule, the Prairie Band continued to defy the American agents and missionaries who attempted to control their methods of food production, and in turn, their Potawatomi identity.

The production of food in the Prairie Band of the Potawatomi tribe, as an integral expression of culture, was the target of drastic reform measures in the mid-nineteenth century as yet another attempt to colonize Native peoples. These measures attempted to mold Potawatomi foodways into an “Americanized” form that emphasized a yeoman farmer tradition, coupled with gender roles that stressed the domesticity of women. As this issue grew in importance, it evolved into a key struggle between the Potawatomi, the missionaries, and the Indian agents. The Prairie Band, however, continued to resist Euro-American influence even under constant threats of removal. The gender roles that defined the tribe in the Great Lakes region continued to do so once the community was removed to Kansas. Women, as divinely empowered producers, remained the primary cultivators of crops, thus resulting in the refusal of many Native males to perform agricultural labor as demanded by the missionaries. Men expressed their role as “provider” by hunting, which maintained its importance within the context of reservation life. Both of these means of food acquisition resulted in the continued practice of distributing food equally throughout the tribe as a symbol of collectivity and responsibility to the whole. These cultural constructions proved influential enough to traverse geographic borders and reinstate themselves in a new homeland, plus resist the degradation and intimidation inflicted by the government and church leaders. The Prairie Band Potawatomi—in spite of Euro-American colonization and removal—protected their Native identity and culture by sustaining their unique foodways and distinctive gender roles.

The Not-So Wild West: The Rise and Fall of Vegetarian Settlements in 19th century Kansas

Kelly Heiman

We've a Communal Home in the land of the west
Where the souls of our people are free.
Where Friendship and Love find a voice in each heart...
Will you come o our home, then, that's waiting for you.
—*Star of Hope*, R. T. Romaine¹

Social Reformer Horace Greeley once said, “Go West, young man, and grow up with the country.”² In the mid nineteenth century, the territory of Kansas was a hot spot for social reformers, including anti-slavery advocates, anti-Industrialists, socialists, communists, and religious zealots, even vegetarians, who saw Kansas as a sort of modern-day Eden. This deep interest in reform is a trademark of nineteenth century America; with the North and South entrenched in war over a matter of social and political theory, many social reformers saw the opportunity to establish a country based on radical new ideals that would stretch the old ideals of, “Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness” to their limits. Within this optimistic climate begins the story of the Kansas Vegetarian Emigration Society, a utopian society that preached liberty, morality, and above all, a deep relationship with nature that only the American West could provide. Spurred by the words of Horace Greeley, among other ideologues including Amos Bronson Alcott, Sylvester Graham and Henry David Thoreau, the Kansas Vegetarian Emigration Society was an experiment in nineteenth century social theory. Its ultimate failure is a marker in the development of vegetarianism, as well as a cautionary tale of optimism gone sour.

Vegetarianism in the nineteenth century was not only a dietary movement, but also a social one. Henry S. Clubb founded the Vegetarian Kansas Emigration Society in 1855. While this society appeared to be quite radical—based on the principles of vegetarianism, anti-slavery, communal and suburban living, and abstinence from alcohol—it quickly attracted a small following of rather average individuals, revealing the appeal that social change had at the time. About fifty families, mostly from cities throughout the East Coast, made the pilgrimage to their utopian Mecca: Neosho County, Kansas. In its early development, Clubb reported, “The members of the companies include nearly one hundred

¹ Fogarty, Robert S., *All Things New*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990). 104.

² http://www.famousquotesandauthors.com/authors/horace_greeley_quotes.html

individuals, most of whom are heads of families...”³ Clubb hoped to attract moral individuals who sought freedom from the corruption of cities and would be willing to make this pledge:

I, -----, do voluntarily agree to abstain from all intoxicating liquors as beverages, from tobacco in every form, and from the flesh of animals; to promote social, moral, and political freedom; to maintain the observance of all good and righteous laws, and to otherwise conform to the rules adopted by a majority of the Vegetarian Settlement Company.⁴

With this pledge, the members of the Vegetarian Kansas Emigration Society became reformers actively participating in a movement which sought to improve not only the conditions of their own lives, but the lives of everyone and everything they come into contact with, through a compassionate mindset towards all life forms, and a fair amount of elbow grease. They became the select few who would live out the principles only talked about by great thinkers, to be temperate, hard working, sympathetic, accepting and noble. And what better place to start this movement than the territorial West, where the land was fertile and cheap, and these principles could be acted upon, perhaps even included in a state constitution.

The Neosho City vegetarian settlement is one of many tried and failed settlements within the long narrative of vegetarianism. America’s vegetarian story began with thinkers like dietary reformer Sylvester Graham, notably the inventor of the delicious Graham Cracker. Graham’s dietary philosophy sought to reform the woes of mankind, pinpointing our moral downfall on the establishment of industry, luxury and art. These things whetted man’s appetite for vice and a thirst for alcohol and blood. Graham states, “From [luxury] we derive our diseases, our deformities, our poverty and our slavery. Avarice, and the basest passions are generated and nourished wherever it exists; while crime and misery are its legitimate offspring.”⁵ Graham’s solution is a brotherhood of rational individuals—martyrs in their time—willing to give up all tokens of luxury, including meat, tobacco and alcohol, and serve as an example for all “victims of gluttony and intemperance.”⁶ According to Graham, this martyrdom was not without its benefits: practitioners would suffer fewer maladies at the hands of dirty meat and polluted air, feel more energized due to achieving appropriate levels of sleep and exercise, and achieve longevity due to an overall happier constitution. Graham, a prominent thinker of the time, published his thoughts on vegetarianism in 1835 in the book, *A Defense of the Graham System of Living: Or, Remarks on Diet and*

³ “Octagon and Vegetarian Society,” *The Kansas Herald of Freedom*, May 03, 1856, issue 13, column B.

⁴ Colt, Miriam D., *Went to Kansas*, (Watertown: L. Ingalls & Co., 1862). 290.

⁵ Graham, Sylvester, *A Defense of the Graham System of Living: Or, Remarks on Diet and Regimen*, (New York: W. Applegate). 18.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 8.

Regimen. While there is no evidence that Graham directly influenced Clubb, his arguments on vegetarianism directly reflect those same principles upon which Clubb based the Kansas Vegetarian Emigration Society some twenty years later.

Graham defended both the philosophical basis for vegetarianism, as well as a biological one. In his book, Graham offered a detailed, scientific, nineteenth century account of man's evolution, stating that everything about man's anatomy, from the shape of his teeth to the nature of his digestive system to his close biological resemblance to vegetarian mammals, such as apes and monkeys reveal mankind's evolutionary predisposition towards vegetarianism. His scientific hypotheses were verified by naturalist doctors of the time, and his introduction contains a signed note of approval, dated July 22, 1834 by the Portland Medical Association, stating, "If [Graham's] doctrines in respect to diet and general regimen should be universally adopted, the cause of temperance and morality would be essentially promoted and the physician's services rarely needed."⁷ Contemporaries of Graham, including transcendentalists like Amos Bronson Alcott and Henry David Thoreau cared less about his scientific theories and focused instead on his social doctrine.

A precursor to the Kansas Vegetarian Emigration Society was Fruitlands, a vegetarian utopia established in Harvard, Massachusetts by Amos Bronson Alcott some ten years before Henry S. Clubb began drafting the constitution for his settlement. Alcott, a philosopher, transcendentalist, and vegetarian undoubtedly inspired much of Clubb's rhetoric. Smaller than the Neosho settlement, Fruitlands was a small society of Alcott's closest family and friends, described as a "New Eden," and based on the similar utopian themes as stated by Graham and Clubb. This settlement, as the various vegetarian settlements to follow, lasted for one brief summer and resulted in extreme failure. The philosophers proved unprepared for the rough lifestyle, with an overly crowded house and little food to go around. To make matters worse, the members of Fruitlands denied the use of any modern amenities, including ploughs, and many complained of sore hands and backs.⁸ A harsh New England autumn was the last straw, and by November, the society disbanded. Louisa May Alcott, a young girl during the Fruitlands experiment, suggested that the world was not ready for the "newness" of utopian societies in her short story, "Transcendental Wild Oats." In it, she states, "To live for one's principles, at all costs, is a dangerous speculation; and the failure of an ideal, no matter how humane and noble, is harder for the world to forgive and forget than bank robbery..."⁹ Alcott argued that some social theory simply does not transfer from a hypothetical to a real-life setting, despite the atmosphere of freedom and hope that inspired radical new social theory, some theories were still too liberal to flourish in nineteenth century society.

⁷ *Ibid.*, iii.

⁸ Sears, Clara Endicott, *Bronson Alcott's Fruitlands*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company). 71.

⁹ Alcott, Louisa May, "Transcendental Wild Oats," taken from *Bronson Alcott's Fruitlands*, compiled by Clara Endicott Sears. 169.

Fruitlands' failure devastated vegetarian social reformers, but Henry S. Clubb maintained the prevailing optimism of the nineteenth century. Clubb theorized that the missing key to the success of a vegetarian settlement was location; hence he established the Kansas Vegetarian Emigration Society. The logic in selecting Kansas seemed solid. Clubb selected a place suitable for farming, with good irrigation, fresh soil and an untapped wealth of natural resources including ample fresh water, timber, coal and limestone.¹⁰ Western emigration was a popular trend, and the society attracted enough members to feasibly establish a small township, with the possibility of growth in the future. Unlike the experiment at Fruitlands, however, located so near its members' homes and families, the failure of the Neosho settlement left its members—hailing primarily from the East Coast—caught in a wild land, far from home with little means to travel elsewhere and no means of correspondence beyond the pony express. One member expresses this isolation, stating, "These intelligent, but too confiding, families have come from the North, East, South, and West, to this *farther* West, to make pleasant homes; and now are determined to turn right about, start again on a journey—some know not where!"¹¹ The members who chose to risk their lives for dietary principles clearly assumed that the adjustment to a completely natural lifestyle would be a smooth one.

While qualification requirements for the Kansas Vegetarian Emigration Society were morally stringent, they did not have restraints against class, race, or income, in keeping with its doctrine of acceptance and equality. The preparation for the expedition seemed sufficient; membership cost a mere \$10, all of which funded the company, which would provide seed grain, utensils, tents, building implements, etc.¹² President Henry S. Clubb offered the movement to any forward-thinking individual who believed in action over rhetoric. While this theory was admirable, it attracted many individuals who were perhaps better suited to read and contemplate social theory than forge into the unknown frontier. Stewart recalls:

One great difficulty with most of the members of the Company was their inability to adapt themselves to conditions unavoidable in frontier life; their expectations were too great as to the comforts and conveniences to be found under such conditions. They were mostly from the Far East; mechanics, professional men, and men from offices and stores in the cities, and altogether unable to adjust themselves to a frontier life.¹³

¹⁰ Stewart, Watson, *Personal Memoirs of Watson Stewart*, Kansas Collection Articles. Section 4.

¹¹ Colt, 46.

¹² Hickman, Russell, "The Vegetarian and Octagon Settlement Companies," *Kansas Historical Quarterly*, November 1933, volume 2, No. 4. 380.

¹³ Stewart, section 4.

As Watson illustrates, despite the members' will to establish a natural lifestyle, their previous careers and lifestyles made it difficult to cope with their surroundings. This was true of Fruitlands, as well, suggesting that philosophers and ideologues overestimated their dependence on the luxuries of industry that they so strongly argued against.

One of the families who embarked to Neosho was the Colt family: William Colt, his wife Miriam, and their two children, whom Miriam lovingly refers to as Willie and Mema in her memoir, *Went to Kansas*. Before their emigration, Colt reflects the optimism of the time, excited by the aspects of community and opportunity. In an anti-urban voice similar to Sylvester Graham, she states: "The advantages to families of having their children educated away from the ordinary incentives to vice, vicious company, vicious habits, of eating and drinking and other contaminations of old cities...."¹⁴ However, upon arriving, Miriam Colt discovered that these principles were harder to act upon in real life, and the repercussions proved more devastating than a philosophical miscalculation like Alcott's at Fruitlands.

Miriam's account of their time in Neosho City, Kansas, is best summarized in her book's sub-title, *Being a Thrilling Account of an Ill-Fated Expedition to That Fairy Land and its Sad Results; Together With a Sketch of the Life of the Author and How the World Goes with Her*. Colt recounts the miserable conditions her family withstood in the four months they spent in Neosho City, Kansas beginning with the living conditions. The Colt family arrived to Kansas in a second caravan, two months after the frontier caravan embarked, which was sent with the intentions of building an octagonal-shaped settlement, including housing, a saw mill, and a gristmill. Upon arriving in Neosho, Miriam reported,

May 13th—Can anyone imagine our disappointment this morning, on learning from this and that member, that no mills have been built; that the directors, after receiving our money to build mills, have not fulfilled the trust reposed in them... Now *we all have come!* Have brought our fathers, our mothers, and our little ones, and find no shelter sufficient to shield them from the furious prairie winds, and the terrific storms of the climate.¹⁵

In the above passage, Colt addresses not only the incompetence of the settlement's members, but also the lack of preparation and action made by their fearless leader, Henry S. Clubb, the man who advocated, "...calling public attention to the subject of Vegetarian diet in a way no mere theoretic movement in the form of lectures or publications ever can be expected to accomplish."¹⁶ Shortly after arriving, members reported disappointment in Clubb's leadership. The participants mentioned no direct corruption within the Kansas Vegetarian

¹⁴ Ibid., 21.

¹⁵ Ibid., 45.

¹⁶ Ibid., 289.

Emigration Society, however, Clubb had obviously squandered the company's initial investments, leaving them with few building and farming tools, and only two stoves to share among all fifty families. One member stated that, upon confrontation, "Mr. Clubb had no money to refund but let us have some corn starch, farina, a few dates, and a little pealed barley."¹⁷ As with Fruitlands, the members and leaders of the Kansas Vegetarian Emigration Society based their experiment on the supposition that a transition to an all-farming lifestyle would be easy, and were wholly unprepared. This fits into the larger spectrum of nineteenth century utopian philosophy, based on the assumption that the ideal would be easily attainable as long as one had the proper intentions. Nineteenth century utopian thinkers and their followers believed that if one's heart was in the right place, the rest would fall into place, but this was not the case in the vegetarian experiments they enacted.

The inexperienced members of the Neosho settlement were also unaccustomed to the climate and general wilderness of the West. Despite the fertile soil and clean water, Colt complained often of Kansas' erratic weather. Of one storm, she writes, "A most terrific thunder-storm came up last night; the thunder tumbled from the sky, crash upon crash, as though all was being rolled together like a scroll; the fiery chains of lightning streaked the heavens from zenith to horizon. The rain came in torrents, and the wind blew almost tornados."¹⁸ Rattlesnakes, tarantulas, and mosquitoes plagued the settlement, which Colt and other members considered a serious threat to their children.

While the thrill of belonging to a potential "Free State" appealed to the members of the Kansas Vegetarian Emigration Society, as avid anti-slavery advocates, Kansas maintained a political climate that was tense and often violent. Watson Stewart discusses in great length the political tension between the Missouri "Border Ruffians," especially the travel difficulties they posed. Allen County was a hot spot for activity, as one of the leading proslavery counties in "Bleeding Kansas." Watson reports one example of the dangers and loss the political struggle had on the Neosho settlement. He tells the story of a Mr. Buxton, sent by the community to acquire supplies, including a horse, bookshelf, food, and other necessities. Three weeks after his departure, Mr. Buxton returned, empty-handed. Buxton reported that his conflict happened on the return journey:

He had reached Westport, when a party of armed men stopped him on the principal street, and informed him that they wanted his horses... they told Mr. Buxton that he could go his way. He could do nothing else than make his way on foot. It took him about ten or twelve days to return; much of the way without roads other then Indian trails, and the country being but

¹⁷ Colt, 128.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 69.

sparsely settled, so that some times he had difficulty in getting either food or shelter.¹⁹

Buxton got lucky, reckless Border Ruffians were known to kill or injure many during this time period. The Neosho settlement didn't fare as well. Watson reports, "We realized that we had, indeed, fallen upon troublous times. Our loss would be at least \$500.00, and one not easily borne by us in our circumstances."²⁰ The loss of those supplies was an extreme setback for the community, though some items were retrieved, including the wagon and some books. When Kansas Vegetarian Emigration Society members came across a pro-slavery man or woman, they were expected to be kind, but remain firm in their principles, however the Border Ruffians were intimidating, and arguing with them about politics was a dangerous business.

The most devastating element of the Neosho experiment was disease, due to the drafty, poorly constructed cabins in which members resided, overwork, stress, and diet. To the housing, Watson described his home, one of the more elaborate in Neosho,

...it had no floor; neither had we any table or bedsteads... we bored holes in one of the logs, got poles about four feet long, sharpened one end, which we drove into the holes, letting the other end rest upon a stake driven into the ground; and up these, we built, with poles, brush, and grass, a bottom on which we placed our mattresses and bedding forming a line of beds the entire length of the house. We used boxes in which we had brought our goods, for a table, and for chairs, we resorted to various devices.²¹

Flooding was common, as well as drafts which aggravated the member's illnesses.

Graham's evolutionary speculations did not negate the fact that Neosho's inhabitants, by nineteenth century ideals, lacked the nutrients to stave off even minor illnesses, much less increase longevity or develop a "happier constitution." The Vegetarian Settlement Company had strict regulations on what one could and could not eat. To appeal to a larger audience before embarking on their journey to Neosho Valley, Henry S. Clubb and his associate Charles H. DeWolfe planned to establish a sister company, known as the Octagon Settlement Company, which held its members to the same qualifications of membership as the Kansas Vegetarian Emigration Company, minus the vegetarian aspect.²² The members of the vegetarian settlement—bound by oath to strictly avoid meat—mostly ate

¹⁹ Stewart, section 4.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, section 4.

²¹ *Ibid.*, section 4.

²² Hickman, 381.

fruit and corn, peas, beans, and cucumbers, watermelons and the cantaloupe-like fruit known as muskmelons.²³ While today, these foods have highly important nutritional value, within the context of nineteenth century ideas on health, a lack of meat meant a lack of physical strength, plain and simple.

The memoirs of John Milton Hadley address this dietary problem; Hadley intended to meet the Colt's on his trip, but fell ill shortly before the trip, and ate meat to regain his strength. His illness led him to reassess the benefits of vegetarianism, stating, "I found it wasn't best for me to risk my life any longer in the declining path of vegetarianism not from an insignificant whisper of danger... but from the imperative voice of admonition given under the seal of an experience [of illness] of some two of three years..."²⁴ Hadley established a rational assessment of vegetarianism, acknowledging that it is an admirable lifestyle, which promotes larger social ideals such as temperance, compassion and morality. There is, however an appropriate time and place for vegetarianism, and the radicals who willingly gave up their health to follow its principles, may not have been the noble martyrs hailed by social ideologues, but "unpractical enthusiasts,"²⁵ overwhelmed by the nineteenth century's aura of optimism.

The entire Colt family found themselves bedridden at some time during their four months in Neosho, suffering mostly from symptoms of malaria that included chills, overwhelming thirst, fevers and exhaustion. Within the first month of settlement, many older members fell ill, including Miriam's Colt's father and mother. Even the men in their prime suffered from bouts of dysentery, suggesting that the water in the Neosho river may not have been as clean as the settlement's leaders previously attested. Colt complained of constant headaches due to the stress of being her family's sole caregiver. No individual, despite age, gender or constitution was safe; Watson Stewart recalls the unexpected death of two members:

Two brothers... in full vigor of manhood, were living alone in a tent, about a mile east of our place, and were for some time ailing, but I had no thought that they were dangerously sick; when, through a neighbor, I learned that one of them was dead and the other very low; both were dead within two days. While many had been sick with chills and fever, no one of our company had, hitherto, died. They had died without medical attention, and with but scant help from anyone.²⁶

The Kansas Vegetarian Emigration Society brought no medical specialists along; in fact, Stewart reports that there was no doctor within fifty miles. The Colt family departed, intact, from the Neosho settlement in September of

²³ Colt, 126.

²⁴ Gambone, 13.

²⁵ Sears, xvii.

²⁶ Stewart, section 4.

1865, but by the end of the year, Miriam's husband and three year old son died from dysentery. This was a blow to Colt, who wrote, "Language is too feeble to describe the deep anguish that was smothered deep down in my heart; so deep that my whole being was paralyzed with a Mountain's weight of bitterness."²⁷ What began as a social experiment focused on compassion, nature, and optimism resulted in the destruction of at least one family. October 1865 was a dark time for vegetarian reform.

Sylvester Graham said, "The groans and tears of the old world too plainly speak the irrevocable doom of the new,"²⁸ The members of the Kansas Vegetarian Emigration Society who settled in Neosho River Valley in 1865 may beg to differ. The Neosho City experiment embodied all the elements of failure that one settlement could contain: a hardheaded leader, scatter-brained planning—including the acceptance of members ill-suited to a harsh lifestyle on the Great Plains and the selection of a land entirely too wild and politically tumultuous to suit a communal settlement—and an unhealthy lifestyle, rooted in stress and exhaustion. The stories of its members should reside within the long narrative of vegetarianism as a cautionary tale, not against its principles as a whole, but against its specific developments within the nineteenth century. Optimism, opportunity and action should never be discouraged, and the ideas that nineteenth century vegetarian social reformers proposed were noble, but mishandled.

²⁷ Colt, 181.

²⁸ Graham, 9.

Prison Food on the Plains: the Role of Food Production in the Rehabilitative Curriculum of the Kansas Industrial School for Girls

Wesley James Kimmel

Prisons have been a common feature of the American landscape since the days of the American Revolution. Accordingly, the nature of penal institutions in the United States of America has evolved alongside mainstream culture, particularly with regards to the recognition of gender differences. While prison administrators in colonial America often treated male and female prisoners with equal disdain, American penal reformers in the 19th century began to pay particular attention to the plight of women prisoners, realizing that differences did in fact exist between the experiences of imprisoned men and imprisoned women. This penal reform movement of the 19th century propagated reformatory methods of imprisonment—as opposed to the custodial methods of the past—through the “feminization” of the prison institution, emphasizing the rehabilitation of the female prisoner from her incarceration to her reintroduction into society. Out of this nationwide project to recognize female prisoners’ distinct needs and reform prison life, in 1889 the Kansas Industrial School for Girls was established in Beloit, Kansas. In order to reclaim girls from a “wayward life of immoral behavior,” the Kansas Industrial School for Girls focused on the improvement of girls through a program of physical, mental, and moral training.¹

Modern historians, focusing on rehabilitative female penal institutions similar to the Kansas Industrial School for Girls, have begun to analyze the unique role of women as prisoners throughout American history and a number of distinguished historians have made great progress in illuminating a subject area once solely dedicated to the study of the male prison experience. Yet where modern scholarship has focused on the gendered nature of the penal institution and the penal reform movement, it has not begun to view the rehabilitation of female prisoners from the perspective of the food historian. Through an examination of reports and records of the Kansas Industrial School for Girls, this article aims to explore the role of domestic food production and culinary training in the feminized curriculum of the Industrial School, a school that embodies the feminized penal institution emblematic of the late 19th century women’s penal reform movement.

¹ State Board of Corrections of the State of Kansas, *Second Biennial Report of the State Board of Corrections For the Two Years Ending June 30, 1916* (Topeka: Kansas State Printing Plant, 1916), 648.

In early America, separate rehabilitative institutions such as the Kansas Girls' Industrial School did not exist. In fact, prisons themselves were far less prevalent in colonial America because alternative methods of punishment were preferred, namely capital and public punishment.² Where prisons did exist, they were often simply single rooms of incarceration, unexceptional except for their dirty, rough and overcrowded nature.³ Early prisons housed both men and women and aimed to treat them in an equal manner, yet this aim was rarely achieved. Because all of the incarcerated individuals were housed together in a large single cell, the physically weak, in most cases the women, were frequently relegated to a submissive role. Thus women in early prisons, strictly because of their gender, were subjected to mistreatment. Not only did incarcerated women suffer at the hands of their physically dominant male peers, they also suffered because the early prisons were entirely staffed by male warders. Male warders often used their authoritative power to physically and sexually abuse the female prisoners; one historian even notes various instances of forced prostitution of female inmates.⁴ The male warders unknowingly rationalized this abusive and exploitative treatment of women by relying upon the widespread cultural opinion that women, because of their gender and the corrupt nature of the "immoral" behavior that landed them in jail, were beyond any attempt at redemption or reformation.⁵ In short, gender was not recognized in early penal policy of the United States, a lack of recognition that significantly exposed women to various forms of abuse and ill treatment.

While early American prison policy did not acknowledge the female prisoner's plight, the mistreatment of incarcerated women inspired early female prison reformers. Following a tour of northeastern American prisons, Englishwomen Elizabeth Fry published her observations and prescriptions in her book entitled "Observations on the Visiting, Superintendence and Government of Female Prisoners" in 1825.⁶ Drawing upon her experiences while visiting American prisons, Fry returned home and championed the separation of prisoners along gender lines and the supervision of female prisoners by female warders.⁷ Fry's American reformist counterparts continued the movement in the United States, founding the Women's Prison Association of New York in 1853, the first such penal organization of its kind.⁸ American reformers, similar to Fry, sought to establish separate penal institutions for women, but they also heavily emphasized the reformation of female inmates, particularly reformation through the instill-

² Dana M. Britton, *At Work in the Iron Cage: the Prison as Gendered Organization* (New York: New York University Press, 2003), 22.

³ Joycelyn M. Pollock, *Women, Prison, & Crime* (Belmont: Nelson Thomson Learning, 2002), 23.

⁴ Estelle B. Freedman, *Their Sister's Keepers: Women's Prison Reforms in America, 1830-1930* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1981), 17.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 80.

⁶ Pollock, *Women*, 24.

⁷ Estelle B. Freedman, "Their Sister's Keepers: A Historical Perspective of Female Correctional Institutions in the U.S.," *Feminist Studies*, 2 (1974): 79

⁸ *Ibid.*, 80.

ment of feminine values in the female prisoners.⁹ It was not until later in the 18th century however, that the American reformers achieved their goals. At the 1870 National Prison Conference, a meeting of male wardens, superintendents, and other prison officials, penal leaders agreed that women should be separated from their male counterparts; further, penal leaders decided that a system of feminine programs should be used in these newly founded all female institutions.¹⁰ This conference was particularly important because it was the first official recognition, by male authorities, of women's prisoner rights.

In the following decades, particularly from the 1870s through the turn of the century, individual states built a number of female-only institutions. Early on, they did not all strictly adhere to the model of reformation as advocated by female reformers and declared by the male dominated prison conference of 1870.¹¹ A few female prisons remained attached to the custodial approach, an approach that emphasized the use of traditional and punitive means, but many "reformatories" were established upon the rehabilitative principles championed by early female penal reformers. In particular, these turn-of-the-century reformatories sought to improve the morality of their female inmates. This pursuit of moral rehabilitation reflects the changing cultural conceptions of the female offender in the late 19th and early 20th century. According to historian Vernetta Young, "whereas women had previously been thought as thoroughly corrupt as men, increasingly they were seen as 'wayward girls' who had simply been led astray and who could, therefore, be led back to the paths of 'proper' behavior."¹² In other words, beginning in the late 19th century, prison administrators began to insist that female offenders simply lacked moral virtue when failing to live up to the culturally conceived moral standards of the time period. As Young suggests, this conception of female criminality differed greatly from past generations that had viewed female criminals as equally corrupt as their male counterparts.

One institution that focused on the rehabilitation of morality was the Hudson House of Refuge, built in 1887.¹³ The Hudson House was unique from traditional prisons of the past in that it was built on the "cottage system," where inmates found a homelike atmosphere devoid of the stereotypical cells and bars of conventional prisons.¹⁴ This was important because it was emblematic of the feminized nature, in the strict architectural sense, of the separate women's

⁹ "Feminine" values, in an early 20th century context, reflect the gendered nature of early American society. These early reformers sought to instill "feminine" values in female prisoners in hopes that the reformed prisoners would fit seamlessly into the culturally constructed role for women of the time period.

¹⁰ E.C. Wines, *Transactions of the National Congress on Penitentiary and Reformatory Discipline Held at Cincinnati, Ohio, October 12-18, 1870* (Albany: Werd, Parsons and Company, 1871), 543.

¹¹ Nicole Rafter, *Partial Justice: State Prisons and Their Inmates, 1800-1935* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1985), 33.

¹² Vernetta D. Young and Rebecca Reviere, *Women Behind Bars: Gender and Race in US Prisons* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2006), 38.

¹³ Pollock, *Women*, 27.

¹⁴ Freedman, *Their Sister's Keepers: A Historical Perspective*, 88.

prisons of the late 19th century. Simply put, through a more feminine prison environment, an environment absent of masculine architectural features, penal reformers hoped to adapt the predominately masculine prison structure to a softer and more feminine design they thought better suited to improve the behavior of the female inmates. Not only did prisoners at Hudson House live in cottages that better resembled private homes than the monolithic prison structures of the typical prison for male inmates, they also participated in a noticeably feminized daily program that emphasized domestic training, including cooking, gardening, and farming.¹⁵ This sort of training contrasted with the daily program of hard labor, most notably the production of coal, in which male prisoners of the day participated. Instead of being imprisoned in a masculine environment or working in the masculine industries of their male counterparts, female prisoners in the newly founded reformatories enjoyed the hospitality of a feminine institution and the privileges of an equally feminine program that reformers believed would be specifically suited to the reformation of female deviants.

In 1889, the State of Kansas officially established the Kansas Industrial School for Girls. The Kansas Industrial School for Girls, located in Beloit, Kansas (a rural town in the north central region of the state), adopted the primary objectives of the women's penal reform movement, placing heavy emphasis on the reformation of the female prisoner's morality. Where American penal psychologists defined male criminality as the product of a disordered life, idle behavior, or lack of work ethic, Kansas prison administrators characterized female criminality as a result of wayward morality.¹⁶ This characterization is reflected in the crimes of the prisoners sentenced to the prison. Of the seventy-one girls that constituted the population of the Kansas Industrial School for Girls, forty-eight were committed solely because of "Incorrigibility, Delinquency and Immorality."¹⁷ While these offenses appear quite vague to the modern eye, considering the gendered nature of the early twentieth century world, these crimes can be directly traced to the concept of moral deviance; the women committed to the Industrial School were guilty of not living within their gendered societal roles. Important to the rehabilitative nature of the Kansas Industrial School, therefore, was the concept that the female prisoners were not hardened criminals, but simply girls that had drifted from the "proper" moral path. Thus instead of strictly focusing on improving a masculine conception of work ethic within each inmate, as was the common objective of the male prisons of the time, the Industrial School focused on the task of reforming the moral nature of the incarcerated women.

Simply reforming the moral character of the imprisoned was not the only objective of the Kansas Industrial School. The Industrial School also sought

¹⁵ Freedman, *Their Sister's Keepers: Women's Prison Reforms*, 68.

¹⁶ Kansas Board of Control of the State Charitable Institutions of Kansas, *First Annual and Biennial Report of the Board of Control of the State Charitable Institutions of Kansas, for the Two Years Ending June 30, 1906* (Topeka: State Printing Office, 1906), 648; Britton, *At Work in the Iron Cage*, 26.

¹⁷ State Board of Corrections, *Second Biennial Report*, 106.

to provide the women with manual skills that would allow them to function as “proper” women in early 20th century American society. The merits of teaching manual skills to the women did not rest in practicality alone; early prison administrators also felt that manual skill and labor had a direct influence on moral virtue. As Julia B. Perry, superintendent of the Kansas Industrial School for Girls from 1900-1910, stated in her 1906 report to the Governor of Kansas, “manual training is the best training that can be given to develop the morals.”¹⁸ Another benefit of learning a manual skill, according to Perry, was that “the spirit of industry is the greatest safeguard against a life of vice and crime.” In that respect, early administrators such as Perry felt that manual training would inhibit future criminal behavior. Yet, although superintendent Perry recognized the values of teaching practical manual skills to the imprisoned women, the main goal of the Kansas Industrial School for Girls was moral rehabilitation, reflected in her statement claiming that, “Morality must be the ultimate end to be accomplished in all teaching.”¹⁹ In other words, while the Industrial school intended to teach the prisoners manual skills, the main objective of the Kansas Industrial School for Girls was centered on reforming the morality of the women, an objective that paralleled the broader women’s penal reform movement.

In order to create an atmosphere suitable for the reformation of the female moral character, the Kansas Industrial School for Girls adopted both the architectural and administrative structure of the Hudson House and of the broader women’s reformatory movement. Structurally, the Industrial School for Girls developed along the cottage system model, one that more resembled a farmstead than a typical penitentiary. The Industrial School for Girls included only one cottage in 1895, but soon expanded to include two other cottages, a chicken coop, a detached laundry building, and a large stock barn by 1902.²⁰ Further following the female-specific penal reform prescriptions of Elizabeth Fry, women filled the Industrial School’s administrative ranks, serving as administrators, guards, and educators. These strong women, known as matrons, assumed an authoritarian, yet motherly role over the inmates. Women, rather than men, in positions of authority at the Kansas Industrial School for Girls lessened the opportunity for abuse and neglect based upon gender differences, but more importantly, gave the female prisoners a motherly feminine presence after which they could model their lives. In this way, the style of imprisonment exposed female prisoners incarcerated at the Industrial School to a more homelike and late 19th century “feminine” atmosphere, as opposed to the infamous masculine penal institutions for male prisoners located in Lansing and Leavenworth Kansas. Housed in a softer, more feminine cottage system and guarded solely by refined female wardens, the incarcerated women of the Industrial School were not just exposed to a more

¹⁸ Kansas Board of Control, *First Annual and Biennial Report*, 649.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 651.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 664.

feminine atmosphere, but rather “surrounded with an atmosphere of morality,” as described by a University of Kansas professor of sociology in 1912.²¹

The Industrial School’s curriculum was the most important tool administrators developed in their quest to reform inmates’ moral character. The curriculum of the Kansas Industrial School, as in other similarly structured reformatories for women, consisted of a two-pronged program, focused on both mental and physical training. The mental training consisted primarily of education in a classroom setting, while the physical training incorporated physical exercise with the obtainment of manual skills. In order to reform the female prisoners’ morality, the primary goal identified by Superintendent Perry in 1906, administrators established programs that placed heavy emphasis on what they felt were the proper vocations for women of the time period; they placed substantial emphasis on the reformation of the female prisoner’s morality through domestic labor and domestic education. According to the prison administrators, not only would the mental and physical training improve the moral character of the imprisoned, it would also provide the women with domestic skills and practical knowledge useful in their reintroduction into the rural environment of early 20th century Kansas. Central to curriculum of the Kansas Industrial School for Girls was a daily schedule of the rehabilitative training, of the mental and physical variety, focused on turning what society perceived to be morally deviant women into females that could adequately function within the gender based roles of society, specifically in the role of functioning homemaker.

The “Domestic Science” department played a central role in the mental training portion of the Kansas Industrial School for Girls’ rehabilitative curriculum.²² According to the report of superintendent Perry, the domestic science department adopted a curriculum and structure that reflected the agriculturally based curriculum and structure of the Kansas Agricultural College, the predecessor to modern day Kansas State University. In 1906, the Industrial School offered imprisoned women a total of six hours of formal instruction each day, broken down into four separate classes, each lasting an hour and a half.²³ By 1916 however, the number of available hours of formal instruction per day increased to eight, as each class lengthened to two full hours.²⁴ This two-hour increase over a ten-year period likely reflects the increased emphasis prison administrators put on education. Compared to the thirty-minute time-span allotted for formal music education via the music department and one half hour allotted for formal physical exercise via the gymnasium department, the domestic science department stands out in the amount of formal instruction offered.²⁵ As its name suggests, the domestic

²¹ Frank W. Blackmar, *Kansas; A Cyclopedia of State History, Embracing Events, Institutions, Industries, Counties, Cities, Towns, Prominent Persons, etc. : With a Supplementary Volume Devoted to Selected Personal History and Reminiscence* (Chicago: Standard Publishing Co., 1912), 933-936.

²² State Board of Corrections, *Second Biennial Report*, 100.

²³ Kansas Board of Control, *First Annual and Biennial Report*, 668.

²⁴ State Board of Corrections, *Second Biennial Report*, 100

²⁵ State Board of Corrections, *Second Biennial Report*, 97.

science department's curriculum was focused on activities critical to the proper maintenance of a family and household. For instance, in the domestic science department, prisoners spent a small portion of their time learning the proper techniques for laundering clothes. In fact, under the watchful eye of a teacher, the female prisoners applied the laundry skills they learned; they laundered all of the aprons, towels, and linens used throughout the facility.²⁶

Yet while the programs of the domestic science department encompassed laundering, domestic food production formed the core of the department's curriculum. In order for the female prisoners to be reformed and reintroduced into society as functioning homemakers, it was critical that they learn to perform the gendered role of homemaker, namely how to properly produce three meals a day in a domestic setting. Through mental training and education, the women learned these skills. They began by studying food itself; prisoners studied the different nutritional values of foods, the composition of specific foods, and the different ways to select and prepare certain foods.²⁷ Beyond that, the curriculum covered dietary considerations in preparing food for the sick. Inmates also learned the proper way to preserve fresh foods for wintertime, deploying the most modern technology available for this economically motivated endeavor, "canning."²⁸ In 1916, superintendent Miss Franklin R. Wilson summarized the educational effort, with regards to the food production, of the Domestic Science department, saying that, "the relation of food to health and the economy in the preparation of food has been emphasized."²⁹ By learning about the proper selection, preparation, and preservation of foods, as well as domestic health and economic considerations in the preparation of food, the inmates at the Kansas Industrial School for Girls increased their ability to function as homemakers in the early 20th century.

The training in the domestic science department did not stop with simply learning the theory behind proper methods for the selection, preparation, and preservation of food, but instead continued as the prisoners applied the theory in practical settings. As part of their education, prisoners used the knowledge learned in the educational programs to plan, prepare, and serve breakfasts, lunches, and dinners to their fellow inmates within each cottage.³⁰ Preparing actual meals under the watchful eye of a female warden allowed each prisoner to get hands-on experience in the techniques of domestic food production, hands on experience administrators considered essential to the female prisoners' rehabilitation and reintroduction into society. Standing in stark contrast to the cafeteria-style dining environment of the men's prison, the familial atmosphere provided by the cottage system was ideal for this type of hands-on experience. The cottage system was ideal because it allowed the women to prepare meals in a small domestic setting, a setting that closely mimicked the atmosphere in which prison administrators

²⁶ Kansas Board of Control, *First Annual and Biennial Report*, 668.

²⁷ *Ibid.*; State Board of Corrections, *Second Biennial Report*, 100.

²⁸ Kansas Board of Control, *First Annual and Biennial Report*, 668.

²⁹ State Board of Corrections, *Second Biennial Report*, 100.

³⁰ Kansas Board of Control, *First Annual and Biennial Report*, 668.

envisioned the women working. If women were deficient in their household skills, administrators gave them further instruction, such as a bi-weekly class that taught special serving lessons to women with less developed skills.³¹ Where women became proficient in the domestic realm, they were allowed to prepare and serve a meal each evening to the administrators of the prison.³² Regardless if their domestic skills were lacking, or if they possessed advanced abilities, the imprisoned women at the Kansas Industrial School for Girls had the opportunity to improve upon their household skills through the educational programs and practical experiences provided by the domestic science department.

Although the female prisoners' hands-on work, such as preparing and serving food, can certainly be considered work of a physical nature because the women physically prepared and served the meals, the physical portion of the Kansas Industrial School for Girls' rehabilitative curriculum, according to prison administrators, actually rested in the agricultural production of the various foodstuffs needed for self-sufficiency. In the dairy department the prisoners supplied manual labor and provided the institution with foodstuffs, while at the same time improving their moral character through physical labor. The Industrial School established the dairy department in 1906, utilizing the large stock barn erected four years earlier. When reporting on the work of inmates in the dairy department, superintendent Perry acknowledged, "eight to ten [prisoners] engage regularly in this work."³³ In the early years of the dairy department, the work consisted of manually milking the cows and manually processing the milk, separating the milk from the butter. This work was known to be quite tedious and labor intensive, yet superintendent Perry reported that the inmates were "greatly in love with this industry."³⁴ From its humble beginnings in 1906, the dairy department at the Kansas Industrial School for Girls substantially increased each year. The year 1916 was, in particular, a year marked by expansion. The dairy department added six mature cows to the operation, along with a number of heifers born to the existing members of the herd.³⁵ In addition, funds accumulated by selling steers from 1907-1915 allowed the dairy department to expand structurally and add an electric separator in the barn. The electric separator significantly reduced the manual labor involved in separating the milk, allowing more of the imprisoned women to devote their efforts to milking and caring for the larger herd. By all accounts, the inmates took exceptional care of the animals; in a 1916 report, superintendent Wilson remarked that theirs was "one of the finest Holstein herds in the state."³⁶ Not only did the female prisoners take special care of their animals, they were quite efficient in their work; inmates produced all of the dairy

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² Kansas Board of Control, *First Annual and Biennial Report*, 668; State Board of Corrections, *Second Biennial Report*, 100.

³³ Kansas Board of Control, *First Annual and Biennial Report*, 654.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ State Board of Corrections, *Second Biennial Report*, 100.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

products needed by the prison. In 1915 and 1916 alone, the dairy department produced 3,394 pounds of butter and 27,957 gallons of milk, products that had a market value of nearly \$6,000.³⁷

The poultry department offered another opportunity for female prisoners to provide manual labor and supply the institution with foodstuffs, all the while rehabilitating their moral character through domestic physical labor. Similar to the dairy department, the poultry department saw great expansion in the year 1916. In the previous year, administrators at the school had purchased six incubators; within a year's time, they were in proper working order.³⁸ In the spring of 1916, the imprisoned women hatched 2,500 chicks, a sufficient number to provide the school with all the eggs needed for self-sufficiency.³⁹ The poultry department also expanded structurally in 1916, as the prison erected a modern chicken house that provided ample space for all of the chicks hatched in the department. Administrators touted their success, noting the visible moral reformation that took place in the poultry department. Superintendent Wilson paid particular attention to the interest the girls showed for the poultry department, noting that a number of girls even planned to establish a poultry farm after they had left the institution.⁴⁰ By wanting to establish a poultry farm after their incarceration at the Kansas Industrial School for Girls, the inmates demonstrated a propensity for productive industrial behavior, which spoke to the rehabilitative success of the institution. This sort of behavioral transformation exemplified the words of superintendent Perry, that "the spirit of industry is the greatest safeguard against a life of vice and crime."⁴¹ Indeed, through physical labor in the poultry department, the prisoners in the Industrial School were well on their way to a "proper" moral life.

Female inmates also provided physical labor in the prison garden as part of the moral rehabilitative curriculum of the Kansas Industrial School for Girls. In the garden, the female prisoners performed all of the physical duties required of a functioning agricultural system. This entailed such laborious tasks as cultivating the soil, sowing the seeds, and eventually, harvesting the produce. Despite the difficult manual labor, the imprisoned females produced all of the fruits and vegetables required by the prison, goods with a market value of \$4,979 in 1916.⁴² Not only was the garden's produce economically profitable, it was also quite diverse. The garden produced 29 different varieties of fruits and vegetables, including staples of the Industrial School's menu, such as onions, tomatoes, and lettuce.⁴³ The garden was of particular importance to the rehabilitative curriculum of the Industrial School because it provided an arena in which the prisoners could

³⁷ Ibid., 110.

³⁸ Ibid., 101.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ State Board of Corrections, *Second Biennial Report*, 101.

⁴¹ Kansas Board of Control, *First Annual and Biennial Report*, 651.

⁴² State Board of Corrections, *Second Biennial Report*, 110.

⁴³ Ibid., 101.

learn important agricultural methods. Just as prison administrators envisioned the reformed females retaining the skills they learned in the dairy and poultry department, administrators hoped that the agricultural skills learned in the garden would be replicated by the females on a much smaller scale, namely in a post-release, domestic environment.

While the manual labor the prisoners provided was economically important to the Industrial School because the imprisoned women were able to produce all of the vegetables, dairy products, and eggs needed for consumption, it was equally important to the rehabilitation of the inmates. The physical portion of the training was vital to the rehabilitation of the female inmates because it provided the incarcerated women with a set of vocations useful in the gendered society of early 20th century America. More importantly, physical training was important because it flawlessly complemented the mental training of the rehabilitative curriculum. Through extensive manual labor, the inmates gained practical expertise in dairying, keeping chickens, and basic horticulture. Likewise, through “mental training” the female prisoners obtained theoretical skills, including the proper methods for the selection, preparation, and presentation of food. The combination of the mental and physical training therefore, in essence, provided the incarcerated females with all of the knowledge required to become perfectly functioning “feminine” adults. In other words, the mental and physical training provided the prisoners with the skills necessary to be a proper homemaker in the early 20th century. This specific rehabilitative model used at the Kansas Industrial School for Girls was emblematic of the broader penal reform movement’s gendered rehabilitative programs because it specifically tailored the reformatory programs to the roles of women; administrators exclusively taught domestic skills expected of rural women in early 20th century America.

In a similar fashion, representative of the broader American women’s penal reform movement, the Kansas Industrial School for Girls adopted the specific objective of moral reformation, differentiating women’s criminal behavior from men’s and attributing the former to a lack of moral virtue. To this end, the Industrial School adopted the cottage system, a softer and more feminine architectural system designed specifically for the moral rehabilitation of women. In addition, the Industrial School also filled its administrative ranks with female wardens, a prescription of early penal reformer Elizabeth Fry. These features of the prison all contributed to an atmosphere of moral refinement, important in the rehabilitation of morally deviant female prisoners. Central to the “feminization” of the Kansas Industrial School for Girls however, was the emphasis on a domestic curriculum, one that specifically emphasized food production and culinary training. The imprisoned women learned culinary theory through daily mental instruction and applied these techniques in the domestic cottage setting. At the same time, they learned the basic methods of early 20th century food production through physical labor in the dairy and poultry department, as well as through physical labor performed in the prison garden. In this respect, food production and culinary training played a significant role, not only in the vocational train-

ing provided within the Kansas Industrial School, but more importantly, in the overall rehabilitation process of the female prisoner; not only was it thought that an emphasis on a domestic curriculum would prepare the prisoners for reintroduction into society, but also that it would reform the inner moral character of the female prisoner. Therefore, as exemplified by the Kansas Industrial School for Girls, domestic food production and culinary training (the training of food selection and preparation) were central tenets of the all-female penal institution in early 20th century America, defining themselves as equally important in the rehabilitation process as the well-known architectural and administrative structure of Elizabeth Fry's "feminized" reformatory.

Home Economics and “Housewifery” in 1950s America

Julia Barnard

The Centron film “Why Study Home Economics,” made in 1955, is a good starting point for learning about the culture of Home Economics in the 1950s, and about that culture’s manner of combining a corporate agenda with dominant ideas about women’s roles in society. This short film, which appeared in the middle of the 1950s, was made in Lawrence, Kansas as an educational film intended for distribution to high school students. It tells the story of one adolescent girl, Janice, who decides whether or not to take Home Economics. When Janice is asked why she is interested in Home Economics, she responds, “if I’m going to be a homemaker for the rest of my life, I want to know what I’m doing.” Janice then visits the Home Economics teacher, Mrs. Jenkins, to learn more about Home Economics. She explains that “in the courses that deal with the preparation of meals, you’ll learn more than just the fundamentals of how to cook. You’ll also learn the principles of food buying, food handling.” At this point in the narrative, we see a young woman interacting with a butcher at the grocery store (Fig. 1) and another woman opening up her refrigerator, situated next to a pantry filled with cutting-edge boxed and canned food (Fig. 2).¹ Mrs. Jenkins continues “and, of course, the preparation and serving of family meals.”²

When Janice enrolls in Home Economics, she will learn what Mrs. Jenkins terms “the principles of food buying.” Young students of home economics will learn to select the most cost-effective and healthy boxed meal at one of America’s new supermarkets, a “quintessential symbol of the triumph of American capitalism.”³ Janice will learn how to buy appliances like refrigerators and microwaves, important tools in food handling and preservation.

This curriculum reflects the larger socio-cultural context in which Home Economics, a unique subject taught almost exclusively to female students was situated in the 1950s.⁴ The film was educational and commercial, and it was designed to further more general corporate and dominant cultural interests. Home Economics classrooms became an important site of much of the explicit

¹ Travis, Margaret, Script. *Why Study Home Economics*. Dir. Herk Harvey.” Centron Corporation, Inc.: 1955, Film. <http://www.archive.org/details/WhyStudy1955>

² Ibid.

³ Levenstein, Harvey. *Paradox of Plenty: A Social History of Eating in Modern America*. New York: Oxford Press, 1993. 114.

⁴ Attar, Dena. “Now You See It, Now You Don’t: The History of Home Economics--A Study In Gender.” *Policies for the Curriculum*. (1989): 131.



Figure 1: A young girl chooses a cut of meat at a “modern” 1950s American supermarket.

and implicit advertising that contributed to the way American eating habits and the structure of the food industry changed in the 1950s. These classrooms were important in changing and shaping the minds of young American women. They combine ideas about gender roles with technical points about food preparation and marketers’ interests in affirming a society increasingly influenced by agents of mass consumption.

Not only were corporate interests being served by the particular contents of the Home Economics curricula, but cultural values both old and new were also an element in the new, post-war Home Economics setting, serving as a sort of hidden element of the curriculum in these classrooms. As Janice thinks about taking Home Economics in the *Centron* film, she reminds her sister and her audience that she wants to be a homemaker one day. This normative assumption and aspiration about women’s lives is reinforced by Mrs. Jenkins, who talks about shopping for “your future family” throughout her discussion with Janice.⁵ In an article she wrote for the *Journal of Home Economics*, Edna Martin (Vice President of the American Home Economics Association in 1953) argued that the teaching of Home Economics was important in schools, formulating her argument around her presumption that all girls were made for a life of housewifery.⁶ This view was widely held, with some publications even suggesting that the role of

⁵ Travis, Margaret, Script. *Why Study Home Economics*. Dir. Herk Harvey.” Centron Corporation, Inc.: 1955, Film.

⁶ *Journal of Home Economics*, Edna Martin, 1953, Vol. 45 No. 1. AHEA, Washington D.C., 24.



Figure 2: A young woman presents her family’s unique assortment of packaged and processed foods from her kitchen’s refrigerator.

the housewife was “divinely ordained.”⁷ It is this attitude towards gender roles, advanced by both men and women that influenced the curriculum in Home Economics classrooms.

Home Economics, as a school subject, began to take hold in the early nineteenth century. In her *History of Home Economics*, Hazel T. Craig shows that Home Economics was, from its inception, gendered and focused on an ideology of separate spheres. Some Land-Grant colleges adopted the “Mount Holyoke plan,” mandating that each female student spend at least two hours learning about food preparation.⁸ These early programs emphasized woman’s domestic role and her function as the agent and manager of “housewifery.” Public secondary schools began introducing Home Economics into their curriculums in the 1880s and 1890s.⁹

One view of Home Economics holds that in public schools, designed primarily “to impose on working-class children the bourgeois view of family functions and responsibilities’ because of a fundamental fear of an unruly working class,” girls’ domestic science classes became an important avenue for transmitting these bourgeois values to a new generation of young girls and women.¹⁰ In

⁷ Attar, *History of Home Economics*, 131.

⁸ Craig, 5.

⁹ Craig, 7.

¹⁰ Attar, Dena. *Wasting Girls’ Time: The History and Politics of Home Economics*. London: Virago Press, 1990. 38.

some schools, domestic economy classes existed due to the idea that the lack of domestic skills held by low-wage and impoverished women singlehandedly sent families on tracks to poverty.¹¹ Home Economics, through this lens, was literally born of an initiative to domesticate and train women for excellence in their sphere, which by the 1950s meant consuming a vast array of products aimed at wealthier post-war Americans.

The Lake Placid Conferences at the turn of the century legitimized Home Economics as an academic discipline. Taking place in the Adirondacks in New York and attended by Wilbur O. Atwater, Director of Nutrition Investigations of the United States Department of Agriculture, and Melvil Dewey, Secretary of the New York Board of Regents, this conference created the categorizations of Domestic Economy, Domestic Science, and Home Economics.¹²

Terms like “Domestic Science” and “Home Economics” helped to frame the study of cooking and buying as an academic discipline, full of skills worth learning and studying. This series of conferences, and later the entire discipline of Home Economics, was founded on the idea that consumer culture was something one could be educated in. Home Economics was the study of consumption: how to buy, where to buy, what to buy, and also what to eat, where to eat, when to eat, and who to eat with. Although these are “skills” that many women today feel they can master alone as functioning adults, they were at the foundation of Home Economics curricula. Contemporary women may find it hard to believe a situation in which women sat captivated by a demonstration that appears to be nothing more than a teacher demonstrating simple cooking techniques (Fig. 3), but some may argue that home economics was built upon such lessons.¹³ After these conferences, the American Home Economics Association was founded in 1909 and helped to set the agenda for national Home Economics curricula.

Around a quarter of a century later, the American Home Economics Association, with the Home Economics Department of the National Education Association, came out with a Statement titled *Consumer Education and Home Economics in Secondary Schools*. This publication started to define the women involved in Home Economics as primarily consumers. It defined Home Economics as a discipline that aims at affirming “the welfare of the consumer as an individual, a member of a family, and a member of a community.”¹⁴ It goes on to pose one central question: “how to use well what we have, as individuals, families, communities, and society as a whole.” This document understands each Home Economics student as a consumer, and suggests curricula within the framework of consumer capitalism.

Young Janice, our Centron protagonist, would receive this type of “Consumer Education” if she took a course on what Mrs. Jenkins calls the “fundamental

¹¹ Attar, *History of Home Economics*, 134.

¹² Craig, 9.

¹³ Travis, Margaret, Script. *Why Study Home Economics*. Dir. Herk Harvey.” Centron Corporation, Inc.: 1955, Film.

¹⁴ United States. *Consumer Education and Home Economics in the Secondary Schools*. Washington D.C.: Consumer Education Study, 1945, 2.



Figure 3: A home economics teacher performs simple cooking techniques to a captivated group of home economics students.

principles of food buying.” As Mrs. Jenkins is explaining this course to Janice, viewers see an adolescent girl, much like Janice, in a supermarket. She is discussing her choice of meat with a butcher. When Mrs. Jenkins is talking about “food handling,” we see the image discussed earlier of a young girl placing an item wrapped in aluminum foil into a refrigerator surrounded by boxed food.¹⁵ Home Economics classrooms were not teaching students how to buy fresh food at markets, but rather to buy pre-made and packaged food at huge supermarkets. These women were being prepared to function in a distinct and new domestic culture that positioned food as a focal point.

This food culture was one manifestation of a broader historical era, one in which women were toying with new ideas about gender and work. During the Second World War, American women experienced an unprecedented amount of freedom when they were allowed into the work force to assist with the war effort. After the war, many of these women lost their jobs and were expected to return home to undertake “the biggest morale job in history,” a job focused on welcoming their husbands home.¹⁶ Polls in this period show that most Americans, both men and women, opposed women working jobs outside of the home. Amidst

¹⁵ Travis, Margaret, Script. *Why Study Home Economics*. Dir. Herk Harvey.” Centron Corporation, Inc.: 1955, Film.

¹⁶ Harvey, 102.

an enormous amount of relocation and suburbanization, American women were “warned against asserting any war-inspired independence.”¹⁷ These women were pushed to enter into a later version of the “housewifery” that existed in the nineteenth century, into a job devalued enough that full-time housewives were thought to be incapable of performing any other jobs.¹⁸ Advertisers in the twentieth century made sure that women understood this message, and Home Economics classrooms helped to reinforce it. In 1956, sixty percent of women attending co-educational institutions were taking classes that prepared them for lives located them safely within the “feminine” sphere.¹⁹ These women, like young Janice, were preparing themselves for lives as faithful mothers and wives. Home Economics as an academic discipline served in part to keep women in domestic roles.

This idea of the “homemaker” was partly a fiction or new cultural construction, even at its inception. In 1953, thirty percent of American housewives were working and by 1957, 22 million women were working full time (12 million of whom were married).²⁰ The 1950s saw the emergence of new ideas of femininity and feminism. In 1957, Betty Friedan documented what she called “the feminine mystique,” or the “idea that a woman’s place was in the home and nowhere else,” but Friedan could suggest that this even during this period, the idea of the spheres was not universally accepted.²¹ American women such as Rosa Parks, Eleanor Roosevelt, Rachel Carson, Pulitzer Prize winner Marguerite Higgins, Margaret Mead, Carson McCullers, Eudora Welty, and Dorothea Lange all participated in culture and did important intellectual work in the 1950s.

One important change took place in the realm of fashion, where designers began to fashion “casual” clothes and “separates,” items that were functional as well as beautiful.²² As Laura Shapiro notes in her book, *Something from the Oven: Reinventing Dinner in 1950s America*, “the war instigated fresh thinking, and by the late ‘40s a woman’s place was in dispute.”²³ Women like Betty Friedan did not wish to be defined by cookery, housewifery, or buymanship. These ideas about womanhood and femininity were important to the study of Home Economics because the discipline was founded on the ideology of separate spheres.

As women were increasingly pursuing lives based on careers outside of the home, popular media was simultaneously hailing “a renaissance in the home arts.”²⁴ This tendency also seems to be mirrored in the development of Home Economics, which reached the peak of its historical popularity during the same period. Remember, the Centron film, “Why Study Home Economics” was released in 1955, only two years after the publication of Simone de Beauvoir’s

¹⁷ Levenstein, 102.

¹⁸ Kaledin, 48.

¹⁹ Kaledin, 52-53.

²⁰ Levenstein, 105.

²¹ Kaledin, 18.

²² Kaledin, 38.

²³ Shapiro, 133.

²⁴ Shapiro, 139.

feminist classic, *The Second Sex*. Dena Attar notes that definitions of housework actually vary widely, and that it has been understood “by materialist feminists... as strictly necessary, productive though unpaid-for-labour; for Marxist feminists it means the reproduction of the labour force.”²⁵ She points out a real problem with Home Economics curricula: their presentation of one singular variation of domestic labor, presented as an expert and scholarly take on woman’s proper role.²⁶ Home Economics curricula did not yet reflect the complexity of postwar women and maintained a relatively conservative vision of women’s work, determined partially by advertisers and corporate marketers.

Ideas about how one should consume were central to these curricula. The *Consumer Education and Home Economics in Secondary Schools* manual explains that “buymanship,” an aspect of consumer education dealing with the use of resources, was a widely accepted part of “basic education” for all secondary school students.²⁷ Again, “buymanship,” an aspect of Home Economics that would include tips on what to buy, where to buy, and how to buy seems to be a fairly self-explanatory skill. However, in an era where marketers were struggling to sell their then-foreign boxed, canned, and premade products, this particular aspect of Home Economics curriculum makes perfect sense. Rightly, the manual reminds teachers to avoid using sources promoting particular brands, noting that many “bulletins, leaflets and pamphlets are prepared by commercial concerns and urged upon the schools for use in consumer education. Some of these are useful, many are only qualifiedly so, and some are useless.” The program’s primary limitation lies in its framework, one that never questions the post-war regime of consumption and status. The outline goes into the aforementioned questions of where to buy and when to buy, and even into “consumer welfare and the economic system.”²⁸

The course in buymanship was also a course in the display of taste and status. The same manual refers directly to an abstract “interest in social status... expressed very often in expenditure of money.”²⁹ Young Janice was learning how to entertain, how to follow trends in fashion and popular culture (Mrs. Jenkins defines this as learning about “the type of clothing you should buy [as well as] the psychology of clothing”), and what and how to eat.³⁰ All of these aspects of Home Economics curricula were meant to prepare women for lives within a clear cultural mainstream, one that often sees status and social position as continually performed through consumer choices. These were choices young girls were being prepared for in Home Economics classrooms.

This kind of status anxiety, expressed clearly in the National Education Association’s publication, was widespread in the post-war period. Historian Richard

²⁵ Attar, *Wasting Girls’ Time*, 145.

²⁶ Attar, *Wasting Girls’ Time*, 145.

²⁷ *Consumer Education and Home Economics in the Secondary Schools*, 6.

²⁸ *Consumer Education and Home Economics in the Secondary Schools*, 12.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 9-19.

³⁰ Travis, Margaret, Script. *Why Study Home Economics*. Dir. Herk Harvey.” Centron Corporation, Inc.: 1955, Film.

Hofstadter mentioned in his 1954 essay, *The Pseudo-Conservative Revolt*, that the importance of “the rootlessness and heterogeneity of American life and, above all, of its particular scramble for status and its peculiar search for secure identity.”³¹ He explained that, in the United States, “we boast of the ‘melting pot,’ but we are not quite sure what it is that will remain when we have been melted down.”³² Women were feeling pressure to conform, and were living in an era that few would describe as being “a period of creative risk.”³³ In order to assert class status, sets of standards were necessary, and Home Economics teaching helped to establish “an idea of *objective* rules about housework”³⁴ that could be adhered to by status-conscious women. The scramble for status is a clear factor in Home Economics materials in the post-war period.

These concerns about status anxiety made the transition to processed foods harder for corporations and advertisers, who struggled to avoid a lowbrow reputation. The industry came up with the creative idea that all it takes “to become a gourmet the easy way was a simple technique known as ‘glamorizing.’”³⁵ This advertising campaign helped to legitimize processed foods, and even made it possible to imagine “housewives in Topsfield [applying] the term *gourmet* to a dish made with Cheez Whiz.”³⁶ In one high school, foods classes integrated consumer and domestic lessons by comparing “large cans versus small; ready-mix preparations versus those made at home; prepared sandwich filling versus that made at home; ready-prepared cereals versus those cooked at home.”³⁷ All of these comparisons normalized what was, at the time, a very novel kind of product: prepared (boxed, canned, frozen, or otherwise processed) foods. Cooking, unsurprisingly, was a major aspect in the homemaker’s routine, one that garnered more and more attention during the 1950s. Approaches to this basic aspect of domestic culture were changing rapidly under the pressure of the post-war food industry.

Technological changes in the years directly after the war helped the food industry shift attention towards a new kind of product. The Centron video highlighted the refrigerator and the packaged foods as parts of a normal kitchen. These elements reflect larger social, technological, and economic developments. The refrigerator, a relatively rare appliance before World War II, became a ubiquitous household item in the four years after the war when American families collectively purchased over 20 million of them.³⁸ Along with the 21.4 million automobiles purchased in the same period, Americans were beginning to visit the supermarket and to buy more food less often. These changes were motivated

³¹ Hofstadter, Richard. “Pseudo-Conservative Revolt Revisited.” *The Paranoid Style in American Politics and Other Essays*. New York: Vintage, 2008, 51.

³² “Pseudo-Conservative Revolt,” 52.

³³ Kaledin, 1.

³⁴ Attar, *Wasting Girls’ Time*, 145.

³⁵ Shapiro, 65.

³⁶ Shapiro, 67.

³⁷ *Consumer Education and Home Economics in the Secondary Schools*, 6.

³⁸ Levenstein, 102.

by businesses that were learning to reap immense profits by marketing new and different foods to the general public.

Similarly, during the same post-war period, the food industry had to find a way to market foods manufactured for soldiers to the general peacetime public.³⁹ Important during the war effort, canned and packaged foods were able to travel and last, and could thus help to nourish soldiers far away from home for long periods of time. One product that would grow into immense popularity, Minute Maid orange juice, was developed during the war using the same processes developed for penicillin and blood plasma.⁴⁰ Frozen foods were novel to American consumers, and flavors were lackluster, as the processes canned and boxed foods went through largely removed them. Nevertheless, after the war, the food industry worked to transpose these military meals into supermarkets, and started to “persuade millions of Americans to develop a lasting taste for meals that were a lot like field rations.”⁴¹ Just as military garments such as the “T shirt” gained popularity with post-war consumers, forms of food initially designed for military economy and efficiency soon gained currency in the marketplace.

Advertisers aggressively marketed and popularized “convenience foods.” Ads heralded boxed and canned dinners that required “no pots or pans, no serving dishes, a plate which you throw away when you are finished... This is a housewife’s dream.”⁴² These are the same type of products central to Centron’s film “Why Study Home Economics.” The student’s “typical” pantry is filled with these types of “convenience foods.”⁴³ Although much popular advertising developed themes about homemakers hating “drudgery” or the time it takes to prepare dinner, virtually “no independent research backed up this vision of the homemaker who ‘loathed’ making dinner.”⁴⁴ This trope pervaded advertising, nevertheless, and prevailed, even as some of the new products did not, in fact, save very much time.⁴⁵

The food industry in America was fighting a battle against traditional practices of cooking and food consumption and, in this war, eliminated as many workers as possible in order to replace them with machines as part of “the drive for more value added.”⁴⁶ This “more value added” campaign introduced processed, precooked, and packaged foods to the market in an unprecedented way.

This new wave of processed and prepared foods instigated a huge change in American food and eating habits. Concerns in Home Economics classrooms about preparation time, pricing, and getting “one’s moneys worth” helped to shift the

³⁹ Shapiro, 8.

⁴⁰ Shapiro, 12.

⁴¹ Shapiro, 8.

⁴² Shapiro, 11.

⁴³ Travis, Margaret, Script. *Why Study Home Economics*. Dir. Herk Harvey.” Centron Corporation, Inc.: 1955, Film.

⁴⁴ Shapiro, 44.

⁴⁵ Levenstein, 111.

⁴⁶ Levenstein, 108.

focus away from taste.⁴⁷ One article from a 1950 edition of *Good Housekeeping* is titled “Anyone Can Make a Good Hamburger—And Quick.” Another advertisement in the same magazine promotes a meal by deeming it to be “thrifty.”⁴⁸ Producers generally agreed that industrial food-processing techniques made food tasteless and without texture but argued that because processed foods were easy to market and inexpensive to produce, they were indeed the proper direction for the food industry.⁴⁹ During this era and, perhaps, not without reason, “food industry moguls had a generally low opinion of consumers’ taste buds.” One cookbook, the *June Fete Cookbook*, published in 1955, boasted recipes like “Gourmet Pate de Foie Gras out of cream cheese, liverwurst, and a can of bouillon; they added sherry and Cheez Whiz to broccoli.”⁵⁰ Another publication “suggested sprinkling cheese on tomatoes, topping them with banana slices and mayonnaise, and then browning them in the oven.”⁵¹

As time went on, women were ready to direct their purchasing power towards more delicious culinary products and more sophisticated ideas about womanhood. From the 1960s on, such women simultaneously welcomed Betty Friedan and Julia Child into the cultural mainstream. These two women offered up a future that “took place on a wide-open frontier that invited lifelong exploration, and their appetites for it were as big and eager as a man’s.”⁵² Women had come to understand both the virtues and the drawbacks of frozen foods and chose between specific products.

Women understood the role that Home Economics presented to them, the role of the housewife; but they also understood what Betty Friedan was writing about, and many understood the alternative model for women’s lives that was embodied in figures such as Eleanor Roosevelt and Marguerite Higgins. Increasingly, after the 1960s, women understood that they could make a choice between the two. Not all women agreed, and they continue to disagree. But courses like Home Economics that presented only one version of healthy womanhood began to appear outdated, and departments and older curricula began to be phased out. At the University of Kansas, the Department of Domestic Science ceased to exist in 1966. Women like Mrs. Jenkins and girls like Janice from Centron’s “Why Study Home Economics” would have a very different conversation today.

⁴⁷ *Consumer Education and Home Economics in the Secondary Schools*, 7.

⁴⁸ “Anyone Can Make Good Hamburgers--And Quick.” *Good Housekeeping* July 1950: 154-158.

⁴⁹ Levenstein, 109.

⁵⁰ Shapiro, 83-84.

⁵¹ Shapiro, 58.

⁵² Shapiro, 247.

Adventures in the Lunchroom: Nutrition Education and the Nutritional Composition of School Meals in 1990s America

Tyler Holmes

Imagine an entire day at a local elementary, middle or high school focused on nutrition. For weeks or months, recruited members of the local culinary community and food service staff work side-by-side to create a carefully chosen menu—“healthy, appetizing, and with eye appeal.”¹ Administrators contact local media and ask them to attend and report on the events. Bright colored posters and table tents, possibly with cartoons, such as *The Lion King*’s Timon and Pumbaa, adorn the walls and tables of the cafeteria for days in advance. The local chefs give lectures to individual classrooms about the content of food and which foods or groups of foods should be a part of young people’s healthy diets. Social studies classes examine the agricultural origin of many items on the menu, identifying where they come from geographically, while math classes look at quantities or recommended daily servings, etc. Students visit the school kitchens to watch and/or participate (depending on their age) in the preparation of lunch directly alongside the day’s expanded staff. Finally, the kids get the opportunity to delight in the nutritious, nicer-than-typical meal. Perhaps in the days following they will reflect on the day’s events and the meal will be positioned within the naturally repeating menu as a reminder of the day and what was learned.

Such programming was a part of the USDA’s “Great Nutrition Adventure” Packet from June of 1995. The packet included sample press releases, a large booklet of local chefs willing to participate in organized programs, video of regional events organized by the USDA’s Team Nutrition to kick-off the program idea, and a step-by-step plan to accomplish a miniature of those regional events at any individual school. Recent policy changes explain the effort. The Department of Agriculture had recently published a rule requiring that school lunches meet the 1990 Dietary Guidelines for Americans, and the “Great Nutrition Adventure” was just one of many attempts to improve the composition of school meals and students’ eating habits.

Government officials created innovative campaigns, but the facts suggest they were fighting a losing battle. The 1992 School Nutrition Dietary Assessment found greater calories from fat and calories from saturated fat than the ideal portion for one-third of the day’s eating, and nearly two-thirds of the daily recommended intake of sodium present in school lunches. Afterward, the USDA created

¹ U.S. Department of Agriculture, “USDA’s Great Nutrition Adventure Action Packet [kit],” (Rockville, Md.: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Team Nutrition, 1995).

educational plans to encourage young people to eat more fruits, vegetables and grains and to decrease the sodium, fat and saturated fat content of their diets.² A “Team up at Home” packet for parents of younger children reported that fewer than one in five elementary school children ate the recommended amount of both vegetables and fruit daily, inspiring a number of efforts, such as the “Vegetable and Fruit Challenge.”³ In this activity, a poster of 800 squares, each representing a serving of a fruit or vegetable eaten at lunch, would be placed on a classroom wall.⁴ The classroom teacher would then set a monthly goal: determined by multiplying the number of students in the class times the number of school days in a given month times 1.5, the goal serving of fruits and vegetables for one third of the day—lunch (an accompanying letter uses the example of $15 \times 20 \times 1.5 = 450$). Each day after lunch, as the children return, they can cross out their contribution based on what they ate. Should the class reach the month’s goal, then it is recommended they receive a small reward (i.e. pencils).

The “Great Nutrition Adventure” and “Vegetable and Fruit Challenge” exemplify the United States Government’s attempts to encourage healthy eating among American children. During the 1990s, government officials generated reams of documents—meal buying guides, training manuals, educational films, posters, and programming and lesson plans—along with mandated legal standards for school lunches, all in a vast program designed to improve school-age children’s eating habits. They did so in an environment of increasing crisis and criticism, as reformers both inside the school system and outside warned ominously that America was raising the first generation of students who could collectively expect to live shorter lives than their parents. But there is little evidence that the USDA’s evangelism on behalf of nutritious eating had any lasting impact on American children and their parents. This paper will examine the political and cultural debates that shaped and surrounded the USDA’s programs to argue that the programs were doomed to prolong confusion about what actually constitutes “healthy eating” and to reveal the tensions inherent in a school lunch program forced to balance economic and nutritional concerns.

When it was created in 1946, the National School Lunch Program was designed to utilize excess agricultural products for underprivileged youth.⁵ But over time, the program was modified and amended by other pieces of legislation that placed greater emphasis on nutrition. In the 1950s, the program nearly doubled in size, forcing the Federal Government to support the program with cash payments,

² Steven M Lutz and Jay Hirschman, “School lunch reform: Minimal market impacts from providing healthier meals,” *Food Review* 21, no. 1 (January 1998): 28-34.

³ U.S. Department of Agriculture, “Team up at Home: Team Nutrition Activity Book : Fun Nutrition Activities for the Family,” (Alexandria, Va.: Team Nutrition, USDA, in Association with the National PTA, 1996).

⁴ U.S. Department of Agriculture, “My Pyramid for Kids: Lessons for Grades 1 and 2: Level 1,” (Alexandria, Va.: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, 2005).

⁵ Beatrice Trum Hunter, “Revamping school meal programs,” *Consumers’ Research Magazine* 81, no. 11 (November 1998): 24-26.

a situation that continues into the present.⁶ In the 1960s, according to a pamphlet produced by the USDA, there was an acute focus on low-income children as part of the “War on Poverty.” The Child Nutrition Act of 1966 focused the school lunch program, and added the School Breakfast Program and the summer food program, both of which were aimed at poor children. But, in step with the budget shrinking of the 1980s, Congress and the Reagan Administration cut federal funding, tightened eligibility requirements and reduced subsidies.

Also, analyses showed that nutrient deficiencies experienced by children went from being due to underconsumption of calories to overconsumption of fat.⁷ In 1980, the federal government, which had long been making recommendations to Americans about what they should eat, began to do so in the form of the Dietary Guidelines for Americans, “providing Federal dietary recommendations for healthy Americans ages 2 years and over.” The guidelines provided directional changes, and are reviewed every 5 years to adjust for changed overall eating habits in society as well as further study. This creation, which will be discussed later in this paper, is one of the key tools the government has tried to use to influence American eating in contemporary times. As a result of the passage of The Healthy Meals for Healthy Americans Act of 1994 (Public Law 103-448), the USDA hoped to put into practice the strictest guidelines in the history of the National School Lunch Program.⁸ It mandated specific nutritional targets:

School lunches are now required to provide one-third of the RDA for protein, vitamins A and C, iron, calcium, and calories, while school breakfasts must provide one-fourth of the day’s allowance for those nutrients and calories. Both lunches and breakfasts averaged over a 1 week period must contain no more than 30 percent of calories from fat and less than 10 percent of calories from saturated fat.⁹

The targets were aggressive, but were so in a strictly quantitative and supply-side manner, leaving ample room for children to maneuver around them—choosing to eat different quantities of the foods given to them than were placed on their trays.

The USDA faced a tough challenge, but presented a strong front to face it. In a packet designed to educate and help promote a series of public service announcements by *The Lion King* characters Timon and Pumbaa, Ellen Haas, Under Secretary for Food, Nutrition and Consumer Services, led off the packet

⁶ U.S. Department of Agriculture, “The Lion King’s Timon & Pumbaa’s Smart Yet Satisfying PSA Campaign,” (Alexandria, VA: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Team Nutrition, 1996).

⁷ Charlene Price and Betsey Kuhn. “Public and private efforts for the National School Lunch Program,” *Food Review* 19, (May/August 1996): 51-57.

⁸ Joanne Guthrie, “USDA acts to improve school meals and children’s nutrition,” *Food Review* 19, (May/August 1996): 55.

⁹ *Ibid.*

with a firmly optimistic letter (despite the brutal statistics she included).¹⁰ The under secretary cited that more than 25 percent of 6-11 year olds are obese, nearly all consume more fat than recommended and on any given day, and 35 percent of elementary school children do not eat fruit, while 20 percent do not eat any vegetables. Haas then stated the obvious: with 25 million students eating school lunches every day and another 25 million who could, while “the most serious health problems associated with diet—high blood pressure, stroke and certain forms of cancer—are rooted in the food choices children make,” she claimed the stakes had never been higher; and the USDA was ready to meet them.

A contemporary USDA study¹¹ showed that “on average, [school] lunches are high in fat, saturated fat, and sodium, and some fall short of the Recommended Dietary Allowance (RDA) for key nutrients for some age groups.”¹² To meet the challenge created by the combination of goals set (by the Dietary Guidelines, Food Pyramid and Healthy People 2000) and unflattering realities discovered,¹³ the Department of Agriculture formed Team Nutrition, an organization designed: “To improve the health and education of children by creating innovative public and private partnerships that promote food choices for a healthful diet through the media, schools, families, and the community.”¹⁴

Team Nutrition created a whole new wave of food recommendations and purchasing and cooking methods for school personnel. Thick binders of purchasing recommendations for school food service professionals were created based on: size, grade, popular varieties, how packed, in season, purchasing tips.¹⁵ (Some, as there was limited availability,) Cooks could attend culinary school training sessions “on how to reduce fat and sodium and increase fiber, vitamins and minerals in school meals.”¹⁶ Standards were created requiring not just the appearance, but the clear implementation of a nutrition-first style of lunch planning. One such method, titled Nutrient Standard Menu Planning (NuMenus), allowed schools to conduct nutrient analysis on a week-by-week basis using

¹⁰ U.S. Department of Agriculture, “The Lion King’s Timon & Pumbaa’s Smart Yet Satisfying PSA Campaign.”

¹¹ Price and Kuhn do not attribute a date to the “recent study sponsored by the USDA,” though their article was published in the middle of 1996, suggesting it would have occurred in the year or two before.

¹² Charlene Price and Betsey Kuhn. “Public and private efforts for the National School Lunch Program.”

¹³ United States Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service, 21 January 2001, “Foods Sold in Competition with USDA School Meal Programs,” <http://www.fns.usda.gov/end/lunch/_private/competitivefoods/report_congress.htm>.

¹⁴ U.S. Department of Agriculture, “The Lion King’s Timon & Pumbaa’s Smart Yet Satisfying PSA Campaign.”

¹⁵ U.S. Department of Agriculture, “*Choice Plus: a Reference Guide for Foods and Ingredients*,” (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Consumer Service, with The National Food Service Management Institute, University of Mississippi. 1996).

¹⁶ Paul King, “USDA’s “Team Nutrition” raises the bar for school lunch plans,” *Nation’s Restaurant News* (February 1996) .

computer software.¹⁷ The NuMenus program would tell food service professionals what adjustments might need to be made over the course of a week to reach the standard: averaging the required values of calories from fat and saturated fat as well as important vitamins and minerals for a third of daily value for the number of school days each week (most often, five). For some cooks, this removed the process too much from actual food. Thus, another option, called Assisted NuMenus, offered more autonomy or the ability to contract out menu development and nutrition analysis to “State agencies, consortiums of school food authorities, private consultants” and the like.

An Assisted NuMenu guide consists of five basic sections: listing of five-week cycle menus, encouraging the use of food production records—to save the use of unnecessary ingredients in the next cycle by analyzing the amount of waste created by that which went uneaten this time, explaining recipes which have details about where calories come from by percent but not the daily value of nutrients, and last, expressing the weekly value of the five-week lunch cycles.¹⁸ A computer, like with the full NuMenus program, still does this part of the operation, detailing the percent of the nutritional expectation based on the Dietary Guidelines: percent of calories from protein, carbohydrates, total and saturated fat, calories, protein (g), total and saturated fat calories, iron (mg), calcium (mg), Vitamin A (RE) and Vitamin C (mg) are listed for breakfast (K-12) and lunch (K-6 and 7-12) based on the weekly totals.

This procedure, recommended by the USDA, is emblematic of the transition of the perception of food that took place from the 1980s into the ‘90s, what Michael Pollan in his book, *In Defense of Food*, calls “nutritionism.” During this time, Pollan explains, foods were replaced by nutrients ostensibly, a more scientific measure of what people needed to put in their bodies to be healthy.¹⁹ So, while supermarkets became stocked more and more with the latest combination of chemicals and minerals that were popularly determined by science and the media as “healthy,” the School Lunch Program followed suit. The normative change was so successful that Pollan notes psychologist Paul Rozin of the University of Pennsylvania found that a third of Americans believe “a diet absolutely free of fat—a nutrient...essential to our survival—would be better for us than a diet containing even just ‘a pinch’ of it.”²⁰ Eating became an exercise in managing risk, and the guidelines for school lunches reflected the trend.

The USDA programs did not have the positive impact on school lunches officials hoped. First, the training never reached the thousands of food service workers around the country who needed to be individually shown the techniques for keeping fat and sodium content lower through the cooking process. Also,

¹⁷ Charlene Price and Betsey Kuhn. “Public and private efforts for the National School Lunch Program.”

¹⁸ U.S. Department of Agriculture, *Assisted NuMenus: School Breakfast & School Lunch*, (Alexandria, Va.: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Consumer Service, 1996).

¹⁹ Michael Pollan, *In Defense of Food: an Eater’s Manifesto*, (New York: Penguin, 2008), 19-20.

²⁰ Pollan, 79.

the Dietary Guidelines themselves had deep flaws. They continued to emphasize meat and milk—despite their location near the top of the pyramid. For instance, in a poster featuring Timon and Pumbaa from *The Lion King*, the tray has multiple servings of meat and an exaggerated milk carton—matching the size of the servings of pasta and fruit, supposedly more important in the pyramid and Team Nutrition’s literature. The continuing centrality of meat and milk showed the continuing power of the USDA’s industry “partners.” Pollan tells a story from 1977, when the Senate Select Committee on Nutrition and Human Needs, chaired by Senator George McGovern, attempted to alter the dietary guidelines according to the accepted scientific belief that Americans consumed too much meat.²¹ After the initial action, a strong reaction from the “the red meat and dairy industries” led the wording to be changed from “reduce consumption of meat” to “choose meats, poultry, and fish that will reduce saturated fat intake,” a much more benign statement that would keep consumers, rather than scare them away from meat and dairy products.

Marion Nestle argues that the original release of the Food Guide Pyramid in 1991 revealed the USDA’s “consistent history of responding to the interests of agricultural producers at the expense of public health” to the public at large.²² After 11 years of testing and preparation, the meat and dairy industries still strongly questioned the pyramid for the placement of their products next to sweets—near the top of the table. With the aid of some public relations mistakes (Secretary of Agriculture Edward Madigan stated that more research needed to be conducted, when it already had been.), the USDA pulled guidelines back into a research stage for 366 days at the cost of \$855,000.²³ When finally released, the pyramid had 33 changes from the year before—two of which Nestle says are significant. First, the department changed the phrase across the top from “Eating Right” to “Food Guide” in response to complaints from Kraft Foods that the line infringed on copyright, and from ConAgra that the words “might give Kraft a marketing advantage.”²⁴ Second, it moved the recommended servings outside the pyramid and put them in boldface type, suggesting that one should “include *at least* 2-3 servings of meat and dairy foods each day”—implying an increase of servings from the previous guide, the Basic Four. Once again, the government gave private interests priority.

Finally, the USDA’s effort was not financially feasible. According to Florida high schoolers who were part of focus group surveys in the mid-1990s, the food was still awful.

“You don’t know what is in there!!! I have seen them
serve beef stew one day and then the next day they serve

²¹ Pollan, 23.

²² Marion Nestle, *Food Politics: How the Food Industry Influences Nutrition and Health*, (Berkeley: University of California, 2002) 58.

²³ Nestle, 56-63.

²⁴ Nestle, 63-64.

chopped up beef and you know they served it yesterday...it is disgusting.”

“I don’t trust what they do it to save money. I don’t trust what the schools will put in their food you know.”

“Sometimes the cookies aren’t like totally baked.”

“People just don’t eat at school because it looks disgusting; you just look at it and it’s like I won’t put that in my mouth.”

“If they actually made it look appetizing then I would be tempted to buy my lunch.”²⁵

A reputation for low quality food, made with cheap, subsidized ingredients is one difficult to overcome—let alone improve and make healthy—when compared with the cheap, attractive looking and tasting alternatives available. Nationally, 56 percent of students participate in the school lunch program, with High school students less likely to participate than their younger peers. Predicted participation on open campuses, where students are allowed to leave for lunch is 49 percent, while 58 percent of students on closed campuses eat the cafeteria offering. Even when eliminating the ability to leave school and purchase cheap, fast food, competing influences within campus, such as vending machines and a-la carte fast food meals, though they do not statistically lower school lunch participation, certainly undermine the message without leaving the school. This last fact is ironic because of the fact that school lunch menus are decorated with homages to fast food. Children want to eat chicken nuggets, pizza, hamburgers, etc. and in a slightly healthier way, schools indulge the behavior; particularly because it is cheap and inexpensive to do so. Though supported by government funds, the average student charge for a school lunch in 1995 was \$1.25, supporting “Food, personnel, equipment purchasing and maintenance, supplies, and utility expenses.”²⁶ Food service directors, attempting to provide healthy food, still must look to the bottom line first, which is a serious limiting factor. All that can be purchased—and eaten, to avoid waste—is not fresh, but is instead processed.

One method some schools use to reduce costs and assure income is to allow brand name, fast food products to be sold on a regular basis. Sometimes school officials demand nutritional improvement of the products, but often they do not. In 1994 in Delaware, Capital Hill Schools began offering Pizza Hut in high schools when seniors were allowed opportunities to leave campus for lunch.²⁷ Participation in school lunches rose 18 percent on days the major pizza chain’s

²⁵ Delores C S James, Barbara A Rienzo and Carol Frazee, “Using focus group interviews to understand school meal choices,” *The Journal of School Health* 66, no. 4 (1996): 128-131.

²⁶ Pat Snyder and others, “Commentary on School Meals from School Food Service Personnel and Researchers,” *The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* S61, no. 1 (1995): 247S.

²⁷ Charlene Price and Betsey Kuhn. “Public and private efforts for the National School Lunch Program.”

product was an option. The rationale of devising meals around these items, rather than fruits, vegetables and grains—the foods Team Nutrition claims to so strongly advocate for—is the evidence of particular foods being wasted more than others. One article said that the average amount of serving waste “for cooked vegetables was 42 percent, compared with 11 percent for milk.”²⁸ When this is combined with the use of weekly analysis, one might conclude that even if menus balance, kids eating off of them still avoid healthful habits anyway (or turn to tampered sources for guidance).

In a survey of school food service staff in 1997, when the requirement of meeting the Dietary Guidelines had been in place for over a year, more food service directors and managers still preferred planning their meals based on food used, rather than its nutritional composition. This makes sense, as the five most commonly cited barriers to the acceptance of the new standards by school children according to those same food service personnel: were poor reception of the food (39.8 percent surveyed), its higher cost (31.3 percent), the extra time required for preparation (18.4 percent), “the inability to include commodity food items in lower fat and lower sodium menus” (16.0 percent), and a lack of training (9.6 percent).²⁹

Food service workers’ ambivalence about USDA guidelines demonstrates that barriers stood in the way of the reforms government officials hoped to put in place. By the end of the decade, the mixed messages coming to children in the school cafeteria inspired a line of questioning in a 1998 article in *Consumer’s Research Magazine*: “By mimicking the foods available at fast food outlets, are schools failing to educate children to make good food choices from basic nutrient-dense foods?”³⁰ Without a unified belief in meeting the guidelines and great execution of said philosophy, the USDA could not institute the healthy behaviors it set out to instill in the country’s youth.

The evidence read by this writer suggests that systemic change—a clear break from the foods that cause obesity rates among children (and adults, alike) is the only practical method. Yes, the USDA understands well that this is a task which it cannot ask food service workers, P.E. instructors and teachers to undertake alone—children are being ushered into societal norms by their parents and, more acutely now than ever, television programs and commercials. However, a much larger investment in natural foods, great-tasting recipes, healthier methods of cooking and nutrition education is necessary when looking forward (having examined the more recent past).

Morgan Spurlock’s independent documentary “Supersize Me” along with many other efforts have tried, since the 1990s, to drive consumer consciousness to understand the incredibly adverse affects of what they eat, without much ap-

²⁸ Jamie S. Stang and others, “Meeting the U.S. Dietary Guidelines in School Meals: Current Practices, Perceived Barriers, and Future Training Needs,” *Journal of Nutrition Education* 29, no. 3 (1997): 152-58.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ Hunter, “Revamping school meal programs.”

parent success. But a current program on ABC, “Jaime Oliver’s Food Revolution,” though placed in the little watched Friday night television slot, chronicles a British chef’s attempt to conduct a massive change in school food offerings, beginning with the least healthy place in the United States, Huntington, West Virginia. Whether Oliver will succeed remains to be seen. The series finale continued to grapple with the constant school meal challenges of culture, knowledge and the bottom line, as the Huntington school district faced a surplus of cheap, processed food from the USDA—such as sugared milk—and the challenge of kids bringing meals filled with processed, sugary products instead of trying the fresh and healthy food that guidelines said they should eat.

Interested in Learning More About These Topics?

Suggestions for Further Research and Reading from Contributors

Hannah Ballard recommends James A. Clifton, *The Prairie People: Continuity and Change in Potawatomi Indian Culture, 1665-1965*. In *The Prairie People*, James A. Clifton takes on the challenging task of chronicling a people whose history must be built from oral history sources. Clifton traces the Prairie Band of the Potawatomi tribe that hailed from the Great Lakes region from their first documented encounter with Europeans, through their experience with European-American colonization, to their resettlement and reservation experience in the present-day state of Kansas. Clifton goes on to discuss the Potawatomi in the context of the modern world, and the ways in which the tribal identity and structure has evolved.

The Prairie People is an authoritative history of the Potawatomi people, serving to document the issues and experiences defining the tribe's past. Based on an array of primary, secondary, and oral history sources, Clifton's argument is effectively researched and sourced within the work, and strengthened by his first-hand experience with members of the tribe that continue to reside in Kansas. But while the author's historical reach serves to broaden the scope of the book, it also hinders his work by rendering his argument less convincing. The book becomes tied up in covering a three hundred year time frame that forces the author to dedicate the majority of his text to events, rather than cultural or social changes within the tribe.

In Native tradition, tribal members passed histories and cultural customs orally from generation to generation. This process poses methodological problems for historians who wish to study Native peoples in the context of pre-European contact. Clifton faced this problem when attempting to locate the tribe in their historical setting before Europeans arrived in the Great Lakes region. Most of Clifton's analysis of this period is based on his interpretation of early documents, which he uses in order to create a general location and lifestyle of the Potawatomi in the early seventeenth century. Clifton realizes the risks associated with these assumptions. He claims, "locating the Potawatomi homeland and describing their cultural adaptation prior to 1640 is a mildly hazardous enterprise."¹ However, regardless of the difficulties of describing the tribe in a pre-contact environment, Clifton is successful at utilizing the available evidence to draw a well-reasoned

¹ James A. Clifton, *The Prairie People: Continuity and Change in Potawatomi Indian Culture, 1665-1965*. (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1998), p. 25.

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conclusion regarding the lifestyle and traditions of the Potawatomi tribe. He makes effective use of archeological studies, oral histories, cultural materials, and an analysis of their language in order to further his thesis and provide the backdrop for the tribe's post-contact experience.²

But Clifton manages to lose his argument amidst the details and events surrounding the history of the Potawatomi tribe. *The Prairie People* begins with an introduction to the tribe and a pre-contact discussion. The work then details encounters with the French, British, and Americans. It covers trade relations with European powers, and every major war or conflict occurring in North America up until the twentieth century. Clifton discusses treaties, migration, reservation life, and the experience of the Potawatomi in the modern world. Clearly, the author sought to discuss as much as possible of the tribal history, while at the same time attempting to define and trace the identity of a large group of people over the course of three centuries. All of these issues, when considered together and placed in chronological order, may overwhelm the reader. Clifton tends to lose sight of his argument about cultural shift by placing an emphasis on the legislation, conflicts, and geographic movements of the tribe. If Clifton intended to identify the ways in which the Potawatomi's identity has both survived and evolved over a period of time, he might have decreased emphasis on historical events (i.e. War of 1812) in order to focus on the changing lifestyle of the Potawatomi.

Julia Barnard recommends the Centron videos—available online—as telling and entertaining sources to explore the food culture of the 1950s. Their value as sociological and historical tools comes from the ways they reveal contemporary gendered mores about cooking and education.

The video I cited most, called “Why Study Home Economics,” was made in 1955 in Lawrence. This video was made to persuade high school students of the value of Home Economics courses. It discusses cooking classes, clothing and sewing classes, child development classes, “family relationship” classes, money management, and consumer classes. It refers frequently to the viewer's “future family.” The video explains that “many boys as well as girls are enrolled in home economics classes” and overtly emphasizes “democratic practices” in the home. The video also explains that Home Economics degrees from universities can lead to jobs in the teaching field, jobs as dieticians, social service agencies, and writers.

Another video called “Cooking Terms and What They Mean,” made by Centron in 1949, is similar. The video opens with a scene of newlyweds: “the day has finally come” for the new bride Marjorie. Marjorie does not know how to make the dishes that her husband Tim likes, so she needs help learning cooking terms. The film offers a montage of traditional cooking terms “to cream, to stew, to knead, to boil, to beat, etc.” Narrated by a man, the premise of the video alone reveals the hidden curriculum of home economics: traditional gender roles are reinforced through the home economics curriculum.

² Clifton, p. 25

Last, there is a Centron video called “Buying Food,” made in 1950. This film opens with an American housewife, characterized by the male narrator as responsible for playing the “wife, mother, laundress, counselor, maid, chef, all of these are her duties at one time or another.” The film helps women learn to shop for food and suggests making shopping lists (to avoid impulse purchases) and to consider quantity, and quality, and more when selecting items to buy.

Kelly Heiman recommends *Went to Kansas, Being a Thrilling Account of an Ill-Fated Expedition to that Fairy Land and its Sad Results Together With the Sketch of the Life of the Author and How the World Goes With Her*, by Miriam D. Colt.

The book recounts a family’s journey with the Vegetarian Settlement Company from Stockholm, New York to a vegetarian, “Octagon” settlement in Neosho City, Kansas in 1865. The value of this book is its status as a primary source—both as a memoir and as a log of certain legal documents and correspondence between members of the Vegetarian Settlement Company. The narrative is often interrupted with short quotes and poems written by the author among other poets, probably added to make the text seem more literary. While details of Mrs. Miriam Colt’s life may become tedious, reading of her husband’s encounters with the Border Ruffians balances out the mundane details of her day-to-day life. And the sometime exhaustive detail has the value of revealing precisely how these families endured hardships like starvation, illness, and Kansas’s poor weather.

Tyler Holmes recommends Marion Nestle’s *Food Politics* as an excellent resource for understanding how United States government policy shapes what we eat. Nestle, professor and Chair of the Department of Nutrition and Food Studies at NYU, has served in an advisory role to the Department of Health and Human Services, U.S. Department of Agriculture and Food and Drug Administration. She has first-hand experience with the topics she covers. In the first chapter, Nestle addresses the food politics of early 20th century America, an exploration of advice that changed “From ‘Eat More’ to ‘Eat Less’” as the chapter is titled. Guided by her experience and training as a nutritionist, Nestle represents a cautionary voice about the industrialization of American food and about what Michael Pollan refers to as “nutritionism”—the idea that the food industry serves the public by engineering processed foods to meet particular USDA nutrition requirements. This motive is in tension with their other, primary goal which, as corporations, is to increase their market share and profits.

Nestle was at the front lines during the creation of the Food Guide Pyramid, recalling the specific articles by the press criticizing the unveiling, and explaining the influence of the cattle and dairy industries in its release. To read Nestle is to learn that our “food choices”—the healthy food recommended by the government—are inextricably tied to supporting the major industries—dairy, meat, agriculture—that provide for so many people throughout the country. And though simple rearrangements of phrases in the pyramid and associated guide-

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lines might not seem like much to a lay person unfamiliar with its history, Nestle effectively conveys the importance of minor changes in affecting potential and actual consumer behavior.

For topics relating to American food politics and policy in the recent era, Nestle is an important resource for researchers and policymakers.

Wes Kimmel recommends Dana M. Britton's *At Work in the Iron Cage: the Prison as Gendered Organization* because it helps to place the theme of gender and female prison labor in the broader historical context, while choosing to focus intensely on the structure of labor relations in modern American penal institutions.

Contrary to the ultra-masculine, "Big House" stereotype furthered by film and literature, Britton argues that the modern penal system is in fact a complex and dynamic institution; the modern day prison, according to Britton, is a deeply gendered, racialized, and sexualized atmosphere. And while one may choose to specifically select only one aspect of gender, race, or sex for an analytical study, she argues that these three dimensions of the penal institution never act independently of one another. Instead, gender, race, and sex are complexly interwoven and, according to Britton, reproduce individuals, ideas, and inequalities along these lines.

Britton traces the historical development of the gendered, racialized, and sexualized nature of the penal institution, drawing on the works of eminent historians Estelle B. Freedman and Nicole Rafter. But the core of her work is based on interviews that she conducted from 1993 to 1998 with seventy-two racially diverse, male and female prison guards who work in several types of federal and state penal institutions. By combining the broader historical gender based arguments of Freedman and Rafter with the insights of modern prison guards, Britton shows that, from its inception, the prison system has produced a gendered environment and continues to do so today.

Britton's discussion is interested not just in the historically gendered environment in which the prison inmates live, but also the environment in which the prison correctional officers work. For instance, Britton points out that the occupational stigma associated with being a prison officer and the equally low salaries have produced a gendered labor market. Further, Britton points out the structural development, along gender lines, of the correctional officer's profession, highlighting the differences between the "paramilitary" model, where the overtly masculine "brute" prison guard filled the role of prison "officer," and the more feminine "cottage" model, where the "matron" played a central role in the female prisoners' moral rehabilitation as part maternal mentor and part moral guide.

While Britton provides a compelling account of the gendered and sexualized nature of the penal institution, she also gives weight to the role that race plays in the daily interactions between prison inmates and correctional officers. This discussion is particularly relevant to a modern discussion of the penal system

given the overrepresentation of inmates of color in the modern American penal system. Aside from the in-depth examination of the race, gender, and sex, both in the historical and current context, the true value of Britton's work rests in the way that her arguments move the reader past seeing these divisions simply as individual traits, but rather as qualities of the broader penal system. In this respect, Britton's book goes a long way toward replacing the media-fed image of the exceptionally brutal and overtly masculine prison with a more complex and diverse conception of the penal institution, a conception more accurately representative of the American penal system.

